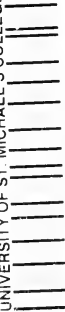


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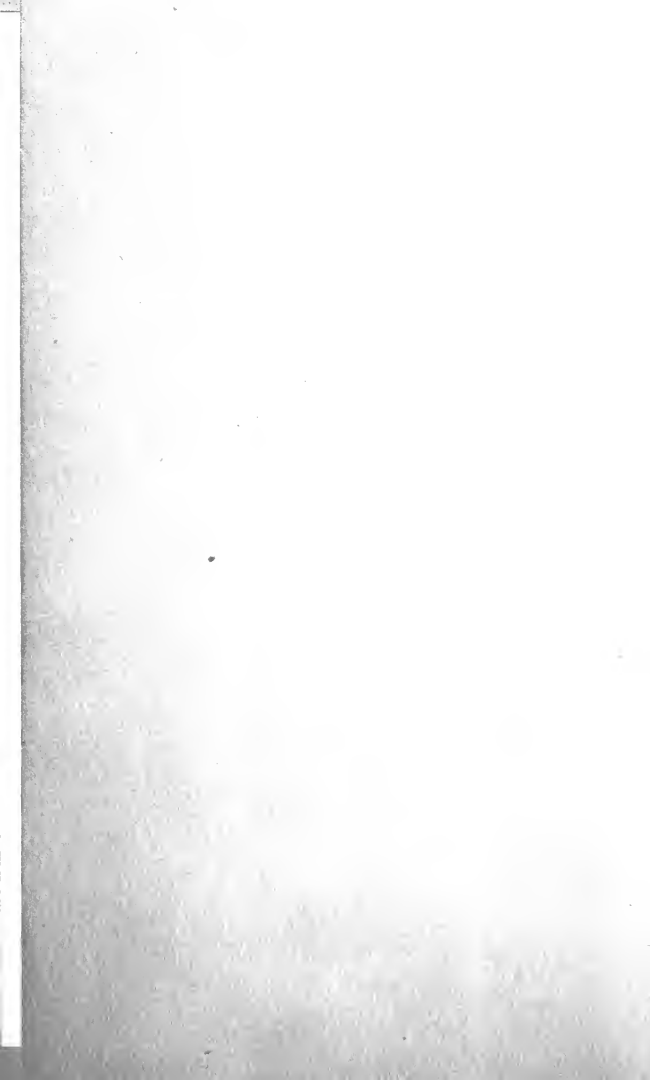
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MEDITATIONS

FOR THE USE OF

SEMINARIANS AND PRIESTS





MEDITATIONS

FOR THE USE OF

SEMINARIANS AND PRIESTS

BY

Very Rev. L. BRANCHEREAU, S.S.

Translated and adapted

VOLUME III

PRIESTLY LIFE

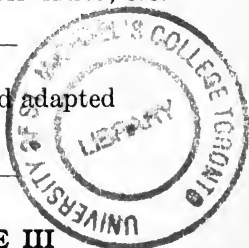
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MORNING PRAYERS

Benedicta sit sancta et individua Trinitas, nunc et semper, et per infinita sæcula sæculorum. Amen.

I adore thee, most august Majesty, one God, in three persons; I adore thy divine perfections incomprehensible to men and angels. Being nothing of myself and unable to honor thee as thou deservest to be honored, I offer thee all the homage and praise which thy Incarnate Word offers for me in heaven and upon earth, and with my whole heart, I unite in all that his Holy Spirit operates for thy glory in his members. Most holy and most adorable Trinity, suffer me, through Jesus Christ, our mediator with thee, and by the grace of his Holy Spirit, to offer thee my feeble tribute of homage.

ACT OF ADORATION

Eternal Father, I adore thee as my Creator; I revere that boundless love and goodness which induced thy supreme Majesty to look down upon a less than nothing, and to bring me into existence. Eternal Word, I adore thee as my Redeemer who, equal to thy Father, didst, in the womb of thy mother, make thyself like unto us, taking upon thyself the form of a servant, living in poverty and dying in ignominy, to rise again in glory like unto that of thy Father, in order to teach us to live penitently, and to resign ourselves submissively to our sentence of death, with the full assurance of being made, by

the resurrection, partakers of the glory of the children of God. Divine Spirit, I adore thee, the sanctifier of my soul, who dost consume sin in my heart by the fire of thy holy love, and dost descend continually into this abyss of iniquity, my heart, in order that by breathing into it that life-giving holiness which thou dost draw from the bosom of the Father and the Son, thou mayest make me worthy of being associated with them in their glory.

ACT OF THANKSGIVING

Eternal Father, I thank thee for having with such great love created me; having with so much patience borne with me in spite of my transgressions, and especially for having preserved me during the past night and given me this day in which to serve and honor thee. Son of God, I thank thee for having by the labors of thy life and the sufferings of thy death preserved me a thousand times from hell, and merited for me all the blessings which are found in thy Church. Divine Spirit, I thank thee for having deigned to infuse so many gifts and graces into my soul and for having so often begotten me anew by thy sanctifying grace, notwithstanding all the contempt I have shown for thy blessings.

ACT OF CONTRITION

Pardon, I beseech thee, Eternal Father, the wretched use I have made of the body and the soul which thou hast given me with so much goodness and hast preserved with so much mercy. I beg forgiveness, O Son of God, for having profited so little

by the holy example of thy life, by the counsels of thy holy Gospel, and by the graces of all thy holy Sacraments. Divine Spirit, forgive me the contempt which I have shown for thy inspirations, for thy lights and for that lively repentance which it hath pleased thee to excite in my soul.

ACT OF OBLATION

Eternal Father, I offer thee all the actions of this day, and I renounce all the self-satisfaction I might feel in them. Eternal Word, I offer thee all my thoughts and words, and beforehand I condemn all that are vain and useless. Spirit of God, I consecrate to thee all the affections of my heart, and I renounce all the irregular desires of nature.

ACT OF ABANDONMENT

Eternal Father, I renounce all confidence in my own strength and give myself entirely to thee, that thou mayest be my strength and support. Son of God, I condemn all the presumption of my own mind and give myself up entirely to thee, to be governed by thy wisdom alone. Divine Spirit, I sacrifice to thee all my natural inclinations in order to follow the desires of sanctity which thou implantest in pious souls. Eternal Father, do thou perfect my soul; Son of God, do thou enlighten it; Holy Spirit do thou direct it.

Pater Noster. Ave Maria. Credo.

I offer thee once more, O my God, my thoughts, my words, and my actions, in union with those of

Jesus Christ, that they may be worthy of being received by thee; and I renounce every intention, but that which he would have, were he upon earth and in my place. I unite, O my God, with his Divine Spirit, who causes thee to be loved and adored by all the angels and saints, and who fills heaven and earth with holy praises of thee, that aided by that Holy Spirit I may join with all those creatures who honor thee, and especially with those who honor thee by mental prayer.¹

Some may prefer the following shorter form of morning prayers.

Benedicta sit Sancta et Individua Trinitas, nunc et semper et per infinita sæcula sæculorum. Amen.

O Almighty and Eternal God: in union with all thy elect in heaven and on earth, I adore thee, I love thee, I praise and thank thee for all the gifts of nature and grace, which I have received from thy infinite goodness. I thank thee principally for having created me to thy image and likeness, and preserved me to this day : for having given thy only begotten Son to suffer death for me on the cross, and to wash away my sins with his most precious blood. I thank thee for having called me to the faith of the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; for having so often pardoned me my sins, for having watched over me during this past night, and preserved me from a sudden death and from all the evils which might have befallen me, had I not been protected by thy merciful and watchful Providence.

¹ From the *Journée Chretienne* of M. Olier.

Would that I could make thee, O Lord, in return for all thy mercies, an offering of gratitude and love proportionate to their number and greatness. Of myself indeed I am nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing worthy of thee. But since, by a wonderful device of thy wisdom and love, I have access to thy majesty through Christ my Savior, I humbly offer thee, in union with him and through his Sacred Heart, whatever I possess, my body, my senses, all the powers of my soul. I firmly purpose by thy divine grace not to think, say or do anything unworthy of one called to the priesthood.

Help me, O Lord, to curb my evil inclinations, and so guide and sustain me in all things that every thought, word and action of mine may tend to thy greater glory, the sanctification of my soul and the good of those around me.

Pater Noster. Ave Maria. Credo.

Domine Deus omnipotens, qui ad principium hujus diei nos pervenire fecisti, tua nos hodie salva virtute, ut in hac die ad nullum declinemus peccatum, sed semper ad tuam justitiam faciendam nostra procedant eloquia, dirigantur cogitationes et opera. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.

Angele Dei, qui custos es mei, me tibi commissum pietate superna illumina, custodi, rege, et gubernare. Amen.

Dominus nos benedicat et ab omni malo defendat et ad vitam perducatur æternam; et fidelium animæ per misericordiam Dei requiescant in pace. Amen.

PREPARATION FOR MEDITATION

Before beginning meditation, there are always three things to be done:

1. *To place ourselves in the presence of God by two acts, one of faith, the other of adoration.*

My God, I firmly believe, on the authority of thy word, that thou art here present, and in the inmost recesses of my heart, as truly as that thou art in heaven, in the midst of saints and angels. O Sovereign Majesty, my God, before whom the whole universe is but as dust, I prostrate myself before thee, acknowledging that thou art my Creator and that I am thy creature and thus I offer the homage of my whole being to thy supreme Majesty.

2. *To acknowledge ourselves unworthy of appearing before God, and thus to excite ourselves to contrition.*

I confess, O my God, that I am unworthy to appear in thy presence. I acknowledge that I do not deserve that thou shouldst look upon me, on account of my nothingness, my vileness and my numberless sins. Yea, Lord, I am filled with confusion at the sight of my own misery caused by my own sins; but I do heartily repent for having offended thee. I am sorry, because thou art infinitely good, and because sin is so displeasing to thee. Prostrate at thy feet, I implore thy grace that I may be converted, and may do penance before thee.

Confiteor, etc.

3. *To unite ourselves to Jesus Christ in order to appear before his Father in his name; and implore the aid of the Holy Ghost for our meditation.*

Not in my own name, O my God, have I the blindness to address my prayer to thee; it is in the name of thy well-beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; all my confidence is in him. Clothed in his merits I present myself before thee, to implore thy grace, like Jacob of old clad in the garments of his elder brother, presenting himself before his father to ask his blessing. I know that of myself I can have neither a good thought nor even a desire that shall conduce to my salvation. Have mercy on me, O God! I humbly confess my nothingness and my wretchedness; I renounce my own thoughts and my earthly affections, and give myself up entirely to thy divine Spirit. Come then, O Holy Ghost! enlighten my darkness; inflame my lukewarmness; strengthen my weakness. I desire to make this meditation by thy lights, by thy impulse, and under thy guidance.

Holy Virgin, mother of divine wisdom and purest love, help me I beseech Thee, to obtain this grace.

After Meditation

O Jesu vivens in Maria, veni, et vive in famulis tuis, in spiritu sanctitatis tuæ, in plenitudine virtutis tuæ, in perfectione viarum tuarum, in veritate virtutum tuarum, in communione mysteriorum tuorum: dominare omni adversæ potestati in Spiritu tuo ad gloriam Patris. Amen.

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PRIESTLY LIFE

I

EXERCISES OF PIETY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the Holy Spirit and thank him for his work of sanctification in the souls of men. Thanks to his help, the Church continues to show the world her army of chosen souls aspiring to perfection, all of whom have considered exercises of piety as most important in the work of perfection. We will honor the holy priests who esteemed these spiritual exercises so highly.

II. We will consider the principal advantages that come from the practice of these exercises.

1. *They are excellent means of fulfilling our religious duties to God.* As Christians, we are obliged to offer religious worship to God. Our pious exercises recall his holy presence and express our duties of adoration, prayer, obedience, and conformity to his divine will.

2. *They are the necessary condition of our sanctification.* The saints of God have all been faithful to the practice of these exercises. The masters of spirituality insist on their importance. Our own experience gives us the same conviction.

3. *They are a source of many consolations.* We need some joy in the midst of the sad trials that

we must undergo. A fervent soul will find pure and abundant consolation in the exercises of Christian piety.

III. We will regret our negligence in this important matter and ask God for the grace to be more faithful in the future.

We will resolve:

1. Never deliberately to omit any of the exercises prescribed by the rule of the seminary;

2. To attend them with the greatest possible devotion.

A heart not faithful to devout spiritual exercises is necessarily distracted on all sides and quickly grows sordid.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the Holy Spirit and thank him for his work of sanctification in the souls of men. The saints are his work. He guided, strengthened and sustained them in the life of self-sacrifice which they pursued with such whole-hearted enthusiasm. And it is also because of his help that the Church can show the world her army of chosen souls who, having risen above the common ambitions of life, aspire to perfection and exert so great efforts to attain it.

In two ways may the Holy Ghost be called the author of holiness. He enlightens men's souls, impressing upon them those funda-

mental convictions which are the essential condition of great virtue, imparting his own strength to them, and giving them courage to undertake and endure anything for the love of God. Then, too, by the writings of masters of the spiritual life, he has set forth maxims, rules and practices, in short, a code of laws to guide us in perfecting our Christian life. In these prescriptions, the first place is given to exercises of piety, that is to all those practices by which we are brought nearer to God, which strengthen us against the weakness of our human nature, which make our fervor more and more earnest. These exercises form the principal element of the ascetic life and hence are considered of the greatest importance in religious communities.

We therefore honor the holy priests who, like St. Charles, St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier, esteemed these exercises as all important and who practiced them so faithfully. And we will ask our Lord to make us imitate the devotion which he inspired in them.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider the value of the exercises of piety recommended by spiritual masters and

prescribed by the seminary rule; they are an excellent means of fulfilling our religious duties to God; they are the necessary condition of our sanctification; they are a consolation in the trials of life.

1. *They are an excellent means of fulfilling our religious duties to God.* For us Christians it is not enough that we refrain from positively offending God. Our continuous dependence on the Creator, the abundant gifts showered upon us, our constant need of his help—all impose on us the obligation of thinking of God, adoring and thanking him, praying to him, in short, of offering him religious worship. To fulfill these religious duties with care and fidelity is a serious obligation, and their habitual neglect is sure to injure our spiritual life.

Our exercises of piety necessarily require that we recall the presence of God. Many times each day they bring us before the divine Master and make us think of him. By this help we can, if we but will, come to have an almost habitual recollection of God's presence, so that we may repeat the words of the prophet: *I set the Lord always in my sight.*¹

Moreover, our pious exercises, if sincerely

¹ Ps. 158

practiced, express more or less explicitly our religious duties to God. Besides the act of faith which they presuppose, they include: adoration, by which we acknowledge God's supreme perfection and his absolute dominion over all creatures; prayer, which carries us before his throne to implore his mercy and obtain his help; the resolution to obey his holy law and conform our will entirely to his. These acts, a résumé of our religious duties, are found at least implicitly in every exercise of Christian piety however slight, even in those short ejaculations and momentary acts of recollection which serve to unite us more intimately to God. They give us the means of paying the debt that we, as creatures, owe to our almighty Creator. And, by frequently reminding us of God, they develop in us the habit of living in his holy presence.

2. *Exercises of piety are the necessary condition of our sanctification.* The example of the saints, the teaching of the masters of the spiritual life, and our own experience establish this truth.

Faithfulness to pious exercises is common not only to the saints but to all those who have made their spiritual perfection the important end of life. The saints have not all

practiced the same virtues or followed the same methods, but they have all been faithful to the same exercises. Prayer, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, frequent reception of the sacraments, are the means which they employed to overcome and destroy the lower tendencies of our depraved nature and to develop the germs of virtue in their souls. Thus it was that the divine love was increased in them from day to day, and their will, strengthened by God's grace, strove more and more to realize the perfection which they desired.

This is plainly the reason why masters of the spiritual life insist so strongly that souls striving after perfection must be faithful to their pious exercises. *Spiritual exercises*, says Cassian, *are not the end that we should try to attain, but they are the road that leads to it. . . . We consider them necessary because without their help the soul can not rise to lofty heights of the love of God.*¹

In the rules laid down by the founders of religious orders a most important place is given to exercises of piety. They are rightly considered the most efficacious means, or rather the indispensable condition of religious and priestly perfection.

¹ Coll. 1¹, 70

Our own daily experience testifies to the same truth. While we remain faithful to our exercises, our fervor continues, we watch our inclinations more attentively, we resist temptation more successfully, and we are more generous in our sacrifices. But, if we abandon these practices or grow careless about them, at once we become lax and feeble and no longer progress in virtue; our faults multiply, the depraved tendencies of our nature thrive, while our supernatural life declines.

Spiritual exercises are the channel by which grace is communicated to our souls. But, if we become negligent, our soul, like a land no longer watered by the rain from heaven, dries up; sterility and famine take the place of abundance.

3. *Exercises of piety are a source of many consolations.* Although the life of a priest should not be given up to pleasure, yet he needs some joy and consolation in the midst of his many trials. The world seeks relaxation in frivolous, sometimes immoral, amusements and distractions, in celebrations, and the like. But God's chosen friends will find a purer and more abundant source of consolation in the exercises of Christian piety, which indeed are not a burden that is hard to bear

nor a heavy yoke that we carry of necessity. They offer us joy and repose in communion with God. There it is that God speaks, enlightens us, and soothes us by the outpouring of divine grace. There the soul can talk to God, spread before him all its cares, confidently imploring his help and his blessing. In a sort of mysterious contact, the soul is penetrated by a ray of heaven's blessedness, sharing, as it were, the ineffable bliss of the elect who see God face to face.

How many times we have felt an indescribable joy, a calmness, a sweetness, when conversing with God in prayer! Has not every seminarian felt some great consolation during a fervent thanksgiving, at prayer, or during a holy retreat? The priest, too, in the midst of the fatigues, preoccupations, and distractions of the ministry, finds consolation in the recitation of the breviary or the rosary, in spiritual reading, or in the moments spent before the tabernacle.

If we would always consider our spiritual exercises from this point of view, they would seem neither too many nor too long but rather few and short. The time given to them we would value as the most precious of the whole day.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, do I appreciate the importance of these exercises of piety? Do I not sometimes absent myself from them upon the slightest pretext or without any at all? Is not this neglect lamentably common during vacation? Am I fully resolved to be faithful to exercises of piety when I become engaged in the sacred ministry? Otherwise how can I hope to go through life as a good priest and remain firm against the temptations that I am sure to encounter? If I have already determined to abandon some of the practices that sanctify my seminary life as soon as I become a priest and am free from the rule of the community, I may well fear for the holiness of my future ministry. Even those good priests who are strengthened by fidelity to these pious exercises have to struggle so as not to be overcome by the evil tendencies of human nature and temptations from without. How shall I be a good priest if I deprive myself of these helps?

My God, grant that I may come to realize the value of the spiritual exercises that we practice in the seminary. Give me the grace to understand that they are the means of kindling the fire of thy love in my heart, so

that from a fervent seminarian I may become a good and zealous priest.

I resolve:

1. Never deliberately to omit any of the exercises of piety prescribed by the rule of the seminary;

2. To attend these exercises with the greatest possible devotion.

*A heart not faithful to devout spiritual exercises is necessarily distracted on all sides and quickly grows sordid.*¹

¹ THOMAS A KEMPIS: *De Ex. Spirit*, 1¹

II

ROUTINE IN EXERCISES OF PIETY

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our Lord Jesus Christ, our perfect model of recollection and devotion in the great duty of religion. He was not subject to distraction and routine. His entire external conduct manifested his profound reverence for God's holy presence.
- II. To fortify ourselves against the habit of performing our pious exercises in a purely mechanical way, we will consider:
 1. *The evil of routine.* It takes from prayer the respect we owe to God. Every religious act, if only a short prayer, is addressed to God and so should be performed with attention and propriety.
 2. *It deprives us of many advantages.* It takes from our religious acts their consolation, their merit and their fruit.
 3. *It exposes us to grave dangers.* It can even make the validity of the acts of our ministry very uncertain. It may also scandalize the faithful by making them doubt our piety or the sincerity of our faith.
- III. We will assure ourselves that in all probability we shall one day perform the grave duties of the priesthood as we accustom ourselves to fulfill the pious exercises of our seminary life. We ask God to protect us from the deplorable evil of routine.

We will resolve:

1. To cultivate the interior life in our soul;
2. To reflect for a few moments before every act of piety.

The man of interior life soon recollecteth himself, because he never wholly poureth himself forth upon exterior things.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect model of recollection and interior devotion in the great duty of religion. Enjoying on earth even more perfectly than do the saints in heaven the vision of the divine essence, he never forgot the presence of God. He was not subject to those distractions against which we have to fight and which often turn our minds from the thought of God even in the holiest exercises; nor was he subject to that spiritual torpor which habit produces in us and which prevents us from feeling the influence of the profoundest and most touching truths; nor to that spirit of routine to which we are exposed in the performance of the most august duties, carelessly pronouncing the sacred words that the Church puts on our lips and going through the liturgical ceremonies in a purely mechanical way.

Jesus was free from these imperfections and weaknesses. He contemplated the unveiled presence of his heavenly Father and adored him with ardent love and fervent prayer. His entire external conduct was a true manifestation of his profound veneration for God.

Let us reflect upon the exemplary prayerfulness of the saints, especially of holy priests, calling to mind the devout care and attention with which the sacred functions were fulfilled by these venerable pontiffs whom the Church holds up as models for us to imitate, St. Ambrose, St. Martin, St. Charles and many others with whose lives we may be familiar. Their gravity of demeanor, the tone of their voice, the modesty of their whole outward manner proclaimed the genuine faith and respect that filled their souls. Let us regret our own negligence in this regard and ask our divine Master to communicate his spirit of religion to us.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Routine in exercises of piety consists in performing them from habit with scarcely any activity of the soul, in a way altogether mechanical. To fortify ourselves against this rather common but disastrous fault, let us

consider: in what this evil consists; the advantages that we lose by it; the dangers to which it exposes us.

1. *The evil of routine.* Routine takes from prayer the respect we owe to God. Every religious act, if it be only a short prayer, a mere ejaculation, a sign of the cross, a genuflection, refers to God; it is addressed to God. It is a word of praise, of petition, of thanks, that we utter; a testimony of honor and respect that we offer him. If we had a true regard for what God is and what we are, would we not pronounce these words of prayer, with respect and recollection?

Whenever we speak to a fellow-man, whether he is our equal or an inferior or even a little child, we do not let our minds wander; we are attentive to the words our lips pronounce. Otherwise we would believe ourselves guilty of an insult. If the person whom we address is some eminent dignitary, how much greater the insult! Such is the nature of the impropriety that we commit by routine in our religious acts, an impropriety not towards man but towards God himself, the very thought of whom should fill us with respect and awe.

This applies especially to such holy and important acts as the recitation of the Bre-

viary, the holy sacrifice of the mass, and the sacramental rites. If we perform these great acts of the priestly life without reverence and attention, with scarcely a thought of God to whom we speak, or of Jesus Christ whom we represent and in whose name we act, are we not guilty of a sort of profanation?

2. *Routine deprives us of many advantages.* It takes from our religious acts their consolation, their merit, and their fruit.

It takes away their *consolation*. For a good cleric or a truly interior priest, exercises of piety are an endless source of consolation. But the prayers of one who has fallen into routine become a mechanical recitation in which the heart takes very little part. Not conscious that he is addressing the Almighty, he does not feel God's presence. The most sublime prayers of the Church, if mumbled in haste and confusion, neither enlighten the mind nor rejoice the heart. The most admirable words of the mass, the psalms and prayers of the Breviary, the invocations of the Litanies and of the Angelus mean nothing to him. Thus the holiest practices lose their charm. He performs them because he has to do so; they are a duty that he accepts and indeed does not wish to omit. Yet he goes through

them without zeal or earnestness, glad to have them over as quickly as possible. If the priest or seminarian does not find in prayer the rest and calm that he needs, where will he find it?

Routine destroys nearly all the *merit* of pious exercises. If fervently performed, they are acts of virtue, expressing faith and hope and charity. The devout seminarian will find a treasure of merits in them. Doubtless they are not altogether without merit even when performed in a spirit of routine; we intend to accomplish a duty and for this will receive some recompense. But what a vast difference between the lukewarm soul that prays mechanically and the fervent soul that sustains its attention in all its religious acts?

Routine also deprives the priest of grace which is the *fruit* of good prayer. The pious practices that almost fill the day of a priest are not only an acceptable homage to God but also a prayer whose end is to draw down the abundance of God's grace upon the priest and the souls confided to him. Is not this the true cause of the success that holy priests obtain in their ministry of souls? They work, but above all they pray. And their work, made fruitful by prayer, receives the blessing of God.

3. *Routine exposes us to grave dangers.* If carried to a certain degree, it can even make the validity of the acts of our ministry very doubtful. For a sacramental rite to be valid, we must be at least sufficiently attentive to make it a human act. May it not happen that we perform it with such distractions as to fall short of this condition? Then, too, serious irregularities may slip in without our knowledge, perhaps the omission of an essential word, the alteration of a formula, etc. So we are troubled and perplexed because we were not attentive to the acts we performed.

Another danger of routine is that of scandalizing the faithful by making them doubt our piety or the sincerity of our faith. Indeed, a priest who says mass and administers the sacraments in a spirit of routine is sure to betray his inattention and lack of devotion by his whole exterior, by the tone of his voice, by the distracted expression of his face, by his hasty movements. But the priest animated by the spirit of faith performs even the smallest act of his ministry with gravity and respect. His recollection is manifested by his every look, by each of his religious acts, by a simple sign of the cross, the recitation of a little prayer, the Benedicite or the Angelus,

by his evident respect when he passes a church or a crucifix. The piety of a good priest appears especially in the great duties of his ministry. You feel, at a glance, that his heart is united to God.

Contrast with him a priest, who is good perhaps, but who has fallen into routine. On the one hand dignity, modesty, recollection, propriety; on the other, what levity, what unintelligible muttering of words, what disrespectful attitudes, what a mutilated sign of the cross, more like a grimace than a religious act, what half-completed genuflections!

Moreover—and let us bear this well in mind—the faithful notice all this. They appreciate it and are thereby painfully shocked. We not only lower ourselves in their esteem, but often their respect for religion, which we are supposed to personify, suffers also.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Routine in exercises of piety is an evil to which we, who live in the midst of holy things, are more exposed than are the simple faithful. When we entered the seminary we performed the smallest duties with a holy respect. Is it so to-day? Has our fervor at prayer and at

mass diminished, or at our visits to the Blessed Sacrament? Is it true that prayer and other exercises which formerly affected us so intensely no longer attract us? How does it happen that we allow our minds to be occupied with trifles while our lips move as we run over the sacred words as fast as possible? Has not the deplorable spirit of routine slipped into our pious practices?

Perhaps we say to ourselves that when we ascend the altar of God, when we distribute the Holy Eucharist to the faithful and administer the other sacraments we will be so deeply penetrated by the august character of these holy functions that we will have nothing to fear from routine. But let us not deceive ourselves. We may be assured that in all probability we shall one day perform these grave duties of the priesthood as we accustom ourselves to fulfill the pious exercises of our seminary life.

Lord God, we ask thee to enkindle our faith and our fervor, to fill us with the consciousness of thy divine presence, to increase in our soul that religious respect for prayer and for all holy things, which the priest more than any one else should profess and should actually feel.

We resolve, therefore:

1. To cultivate the interior life of our soul by prayer and by frequently recalling the presence of God;

2. To reflect a few moments before every act of piety.

*The man of interior life soon recollecteth himself, because he never wholly poureth forth himself upon exterior things.*¹

¹ IMIT. II : 1¹.

III

THE SANCTIFICATION OF RISING

SUMMARY

I. We will try to understand the dispositions that animated the soul of Jesus at the moment of the Incarnation. He adored and thanked God the Father and, with complete self-abnegation, offered himself the victim for sin. These same acts pervaded his whole life. In his resurrection we shall find a model showing us the way in which we should sanctify our rising every morning.

II. We will consider three reasons that urge us to consecrate to God the first moments of the day.

1. *It is the teaching of Holy Writ and of God's saints.* In the former we read that we should turn to God and adore him at the beginning of the day. The holy fathers and spiritual masters likewise insist on the importance of sanctifying our rising.

2. *Our reason shows it to be a holy and Christian practice.* It is a consequence of our obligation to offer all our acts to God. *Know you not, says the psalmist, that each day you ought to give God the first fruits of your heart and your words?* It is well for us to appreciate from the first moments of the day our own weakness against the temptations that may befall us.

3. *It will exercise a salutary influence over our entire day*, for the first impressions of the day are generally the strongest and most lasting. Our day will be holy if we begin it with good prayer; but an important prelude for this is the sanctification of our rising.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we have not often, at rising, harkened to an evil spirit rather than heeded the voice of our good angel, whether we offer ourselves unhesitatingly to God as soon as we awaken, or begin our day by ignobly pampering our inclination to bodily comfort.

We will resolve:

1. Not to prolong our rest beyond the time fixed for rising;

2. To make the sign of the cross as soon as we awake, offering ourselves and all the work of the coming day to God.

Behold I come to do thy will.

I. ADORATION

Let us try to understand the dispositions that animated the soul of Christ at the moment of the Incarnation. From the very outset of that life which he was going to live among men, the Word-made-flesh offered to God the Father the most perfect acts of religion. Him he adored as the supreme Majesty before whom every head should bow, every knee should bend. In return for the treasures of

knowledge bestowed upon him, for the prerogative of the hypostatic union which, by associating him to the life of the Word, made him share God's own divine nature and rendered him the worthy object of the adoration of men and of angels—for all these marvelous gifts he offered thanksgiving to almighty God. In view of the mission which he was to accomplish here in the world, he offered himself to God with unreserved devotion and complete self-abnegation, presenting himself as the victim for sin, foreseeing all that his self-immolation in its extremest rigor would entail.

Throughout his mortal life his soul continued to produce these same acts. Who can express the fervor with which he renewed them when, each morning, he arose to begin another day's labor for us sinners?

The mystery of his resurrection has also a valuable lesson for us. When Christ entered upon that life of glory, which he had merited by the sufferings of his mortal life, and appeared in his unveiled divinity, with what eagerness did he hasten to consecrate his glorified humanity to his heavenly Father, to adore the divine majesty of the Godhead, to praise him for ever and ever! *Thou hast compassed me with gladness: to the end that my glory*

*may sing to thee . . . O Lord my God, I will give praise to thee forever.*¹

We adore thee, divine Savior, as we contemplate thee in these different states, as living humbly in our midst and as glorified in heaven. And we thank thee for having shown us the manner in which we ought to sanctify the beginning of each day. Bestow upon us, we beseech thee, the grace to imitate thy holy example.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

It is a precious habit of the Christian life to consecrate to God the first moments of each day. Let us consider some of the reasons that should urge us to this practice.

1. *It is the teaching of Holy Writ and of God's saints.* From the Psalms we learn that the royal prophet was faithful to his religious duties at break of day: *Deus, Deus meus, ad te de luce vigilo.*² And again: *In matutinis meditator in te.*³ *Exsultabo mane misericordiam tuam.*⁴ *Mane oratio mea præveniat te.*⁵

¹ Ps. 29¹²⁻¹³

² Ps. 62¹

³ Ps. 62⁷

⁴ Ps. 58¹¹

⁵ Ps. 87¹⁴

In the Book of Wisdom the sacred writer, after recalling the obligation formerly imposed on the Hebrews to gather the manna before sunrise, thus admonishes them to present themselves at the beginning of the day to adore the Almighty. *Oportet prævenire solem ad benedictionem tuam, et ad ortum lucis te adorare.*¹

The holy fathers and masters of the spiritual life insist on the importance of consecrating to God, by some act of piety, the commencement of each day. St. Athanasius says that we should prepare for the labor and struggle of each day by placing ourselves in God's presence even while we are yet in bed and should offer to him our humble gratitude. St. John Chrysostom reproves the negligence of those who fail to thank God at their rising in the morning. *Faithful servants of Christ, says Cassian, when they awake from sleep, consecrate the firstfruits of their thoughts to God.*² Just as the priests of the Old Law every morning had to add fresh fuel to the sacred fire which must be kept burning, so, according to St. Gregory, should we at our rising add new fuel to the fire of divine love which ought to

¹ WIS. 16²⁸

² COLL. 21

be kept enkindled in our hearts. St. Francis de Sales teaches us that, besides meditation and formal prayer, we should make, at our rising, a shorter prayer which will be a sort of general preparation for all the works of the day. This short prayer, he explains, should contain four principal acts: to adore and thank God for the grace that he has given us in sustaining us during the preceding night; to firmly resolve to employ the day well; to foresee as far as possible the opportunities to serve God and also the temptations that will probably endanger us; to place all our confidence in God, for without his help we can not do a single good deed.

2. *Our reason shows it to be a holy and Christian practice.* It is, in the first place, a consequence of our obligation to offer all our acts to God, since he is the very principle of our being and our last end. All that we have and all that we are belong to him and we should, therefore, offer him the homage of our gratitude and adoration. According to the angelic Doctor, the first exercise of our reason and of our free-will should be to consecrate ourselves to God. But if this offering is to persevere, if it is to be the habitual disposition of our soul, it must necessarily be renewed

from time to time. In fact this is the common practice of fervent souls. And what moment is more appropriate for making this renewal than the moment we awake in the morning, when, so to speak, we regain possession of ourselves at the outset of a new day?

God's right of sovereignty over all things, by virtue of which everything in us should be consecrated to him, applies in a special way to the act of rising in the morning. It is the first act of the day. But the firstfruits belong to God and he seems especially pleased to have them offered to him. Did he not require the Israelites to consecrate to him the firstfruits of everything as a testimony of his supreme dominion? The moments that immediately follow our awaking should, therefore, be specially consecrated to God. Says St. Ambrose: *Know you not that each day you ought to give God the firstfruits of your heart and your words?*¹

When we open our eyes in the morning, should we not realize that we are beginning a new day of duties, of difficulties, of temptations, we know not how many and how trying? If we justly appreciate our own

¹ SERM. 19 IN PS. 118

weakness, will we not, at the very threshold of the day, feel the need of entrusting ourselves to the mercy and goodness of our loving Father in heaven, of asking humbly and confidently the help of his grace?

3. *It will exercise a salutary influence over our entire day. Give to God the firstfruits of your day*, said one of his saints; *for then it will all pass as it is begun*. And he likewise states that he knew a great servant of God who could judge the entire day by the way he began it in the morning. There are many reasons why this should be so.

In the first place, it is a matter of common experience that the first impressions of the day are generally the strongest and most lasting. For the freer a soul is from all preoccupation, the more tranquil and undisturbed, so the more will its thoughts be deeply impressed upon it. But at no time of the day do we enjoy greater calm, at no time are we in more complete possession of ourselves than at the time of waking. By the night's rest we have recovered strength and power of application and we are interiorly quiet and silent, not yet troubled and distracted by the divers preoccupations of study and business that will soon demand our attention. Of all periods, that is

the one at which strong impressions sink deep into the soul. Wherefore the saints tell us that the beginning of the day is the most favorable for serious meditation on the truths of our Christian faith

If, then, the thought of God penetrates our soul at the very outset of our day, it is apt to remain fixed. The same may likewise be said of vain or profane thoughts. In the words of St. Bonaventure, *if you repel vain thoughts from you then, you will fulfill every work more devoutly and safely.*¹

Spiritual masters teach us that the good or bad state of our soul during the rest of the day depends very considerably on the manner in which we sanctify or neglect the precious moments at the beginning. If, as soon as we arise, instead of occupying ourselves with pious thoughts, we give way to dissipation of mind, if we become absorbed with the thoughts of study, if we allow our hearts to pursue worldly desires and our imagination to be filled with a thousand fancies, prayer will be almost impossible, our mind will wander into the by-path of countless distractions and we will derive little or no fruit from our subse-

¹ AD NOVIT.

quent prayer. Thus an entire day without supernatural recollection and with little merit before God will be the consequence of a rising not sanctified by consecration to God.

But, on the other hand, when our first thought is the remembrance of God's presence, we are rightly prepared for meditation and will find much less difficulty in concentrating our attention on the sacred truths which are to form the subject of our reflections. In this way, by the grace of our divine Lord, we will make a good and holy meditation and thereby lay the foundation for a Christian day.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My first duty every day is to sanctify my rising. The saints teach us that one of the evil spirits watches our waking moments and tries to entice us into his snares and thus deprive God of the firstfruits of our day which assuredly belong to him. But our good angel watches at our side to warn us and fortify us against these attacks. To which do we yield? Do we give ourselves unhesitatingly to God as soon as we have fully awakened from sleep? Is it towards him that we direct our first thoughts and the first aspirations

of our heart? Do we imitate the constant disposition of Christ's sacred heart, which he expressed, saying: *Behold I come that I should do thy will?*¹ Do we, prompted by this Christian sentiment, arise promptly, as a faithful servant who hastens when his master calls?

Is it not true, on the contrary, that we regard these first acts of the day as quite insignificant, that we perform them without the least thought of a supernatural intention? In place of the joy which should be ours at the prospect of beginning another day's work in God's service, is it not with some murmuring and discontent that we arise at the appointed time? Does it not frequently happen that, prolonging our rest beyond the time fixed by our rule, thus pampering our inclination to bodily comfort, we yield to the tempter instead of making a generous sacrifice for God? Is not this an unworthy spirit in which a seminarian begins his day?

For all my negligence grant me pardon, dear Lord. Vouchsafe thy grace to strengthen my will so that, after the example of thy saints, I may sanctify my rising, offering as a sacrifice to thee whatever may be difficult therein.

¹ Ps. 39⁹

I resolve:

1. Not to prolong my rest beyond the time fixed for rising;

2. To make the sign of the cross as soon as I awake, offering myself and all the work of the coming day to God.

*Behold I come that I should do thy will.*¹

IV

MEDITATION

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our divine Master, the perfect model for the priest in the practice of mental prayer. His life was a ceaseless prayer. The Gospel frequently speaks of our Lord at prayer.
- II. We will consider three advantages that come to the priest who is faithful to daily meditation.
 1. *It forms the holy priest.* It brings before our eyes the fundamental truths of the Christian life. By obliging us to enter into ourselves, it shows us our faults and imperfections.
 2. *It helps the priest perform the functions of his ministry in a religious manner.* To the priest is given the privilege of exercising a ministry that brings him continually in contact with God. But this prerogative exposes him to many dangers. Prayer, however, by disposing his soul to supernatural thoughts, enables him to avoid these perils.
 3. *It renders the zeal of a priest efficacious.* It is in prayer that good priests find their inspiration. It is also prayer that gives their words a divine force.
- III. We will thank God for taking such pains to let us know the importance of prayer. We will regret having attached so little value to this exer-

cise, having so often omitted it or performed it carelessly.

We will resolve:

1. To be attentive to every instruction on the subject of prayer;

2. Never to omit or abridge our meditation.
We will give ourselves continually to prayer.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore Jesus Christ, the priest's model in the practice of mental prayer. His whole life was a continuous prayer that neither the work of his public ministry nor the sufferings of his passion could interrupt. His soul on account of the unique privilege of the hypostatic union, enjoyed the vision of God's unveiled presence. He was also intimately united to God by the total affection of his heart. He adored his heavenly Father, humbled himself before him, exalted, praised and blessed his perfections. He rendered the most perfect religious worship to God. In his human nature he felt his utter dependence on the Almighty and by fervent prayer drew the life of God to himself; and this divine life poured into his soul in unlimited profusion so that he might communicate it to all those

who should believe in him and unite their prayer to his.

The holy Gospel often mentions Jesus in the act of praying. In one place we read: *He passed the whole night in the prayer of God;*¹ and in the account of the Transfiguration: *Whilst he prayed, the shape of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became white and glittering.*² Just before the resurrection of Lazarus, *Jesus lifting up his eyes said: Father, I give thanks that thou hast heard me.*³ After the Last Supper, with his chosen apostles gathered around him, *lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said: Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee.*⁴ And in the Garden of Olives, *he fell upon his face, praying, and saying: My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*⁵ Even on the cross: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.*⁶ But these were only the occasional manifestations of that sublime and

¹ ST. LUKE 6¹²

² ST. LUKE 9²⁹

³ ST. JOHN 11⁴¹

⁴ ST. JOHN 17¹

⁵ ST. MATTH. 26³

⁶ ST. MATTH. 27⁴

ceaseless prayer of Christ's soul, a prayer that was prefigured by the fire burning continually on the altar of the Temple.

And now in heaven and on our altars the Word incarnate continues to be our advocate *always living to make intercession for us.*¹ He prays in the souls of the blessed in heaven and of the righteous here on earth, filling them with his spirit and making theirs, as it were, the echo of his prayer. *God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father.*²

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Every priest who has sincerely at heart his own sanctification and the salvation of the souls entrusted to him ought to commence every day's work with the exercise of mental prayer. Upon reflection we will see that mental prayer forms the holy priest, helps him to perform his duties in the spirit of religion, and makes his zeal efficacious.

1. *It forms the holy priest.* He who is a man of prayer will invariably be a good priest, detached from sin and daily perfecting himself

¹ HEBR. 7²⁵

² GAL. 4⁶

in the practice of Christian and sacerdotal virtues. If it is true that lack of reflection is the cause of numberless evils, it is equally true that the faithful practice of serious meditation is a fruitful source of virtue and perfection. Whoever, at the beginning of each day, raises his thoughts and his heart above this material world and, uniting himself to God, contemplates with the eyes of faith God's eternal truths, can not fail to find in this practice a valuable means of sanctification.

The appreciation of the great Christian truths gradually becomes dim in the priest who does not meditate, and very soon they are nothing more than a vague theory to him and almost devoid of any practical influence on his life. But the priest who meditates is repeatedly brought into the presence of these truths, he adheres to them with a living faith and a conviction that becomes deeper and stronger every day. Meditation illumines his intelligence with supernatural light.

Meditation, besides bringing the fundamental truths of Christian life before our eyes and convincing us of the necessity of holiness, makes us enter into ourselves to discover our faults and imperfections. It is this precious knowledge that places before us in contrast

what we are and what we ought to be, thus stimulating our energy to combat our faults seriously and fervently.

The will, supported in this way, encouraged and urged on, will not fall into lukewarmness. Every day it renews its good resolutions. And if we stray from the path of duty and righteousness, we renew our good efforts with more generous ardor, like the great apostle, who said: *Forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press toward the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus.*¹

2. *Mental prayer helps the priest to perform his duties in the spirit of religion.* The duties of the sacred ministry place him continually in contact with God and holy things. With special reason might the priest recall those words of St. Paul: *Our conversation is in heaven.*² He ascends the altar every morning to renew, in the name of Christ, the sacrifice of Calvary. Many times during the day he is commissioned by the Church to fulfill the sacred duty of prayer whether in public exercises or in the private recitation of the breviary.

¹ PHILIP. 3¹³⁻¹⁴

² PHILIP. 3²⁰

At almost every hour of the day he is performing some sacred function. He may be called upon to open heaven to a little child by Baptism, to reconcile penitent sinners with their God, to distribute the body of Jesus Christ to the faithful, to preach the word of God. His whole life is ordinarily passed in the midst of holy and supernatural things.

Although this is a marvelous prerogative, yet it is full of dangers. Must we not fear that through routine we may get into the habit of performing the holy and august functions of the ministry in a careless manner; that our soul may be a stranger to the religious sentiments which our words express?

Now, the faithful practice of meditation is a most efficacious means of preventing this misfortune. By it the priest gradually forms the habit of recollection and develops the interior life of the soul. By growing accustomed to conversation with God, to the realization of his divine presence, to the consideration of his perfections, the priest is able to raise his mind and heart to God whenever he wishes. Whether he has to perform some act of the sacred ministry or to recite his breviary, he has only to enter into himself for a moment in order to establish in his soul the super-

natural disposition of union with God required by the pious act that he is about to perform. He passes readily from work to prayer, from business and human intercourse to conversation with God, from thoughts of earth to those of heaven.

Prayer, by disposing the priest's soul to receive supernatural thoughts, opposes the unfortunate tendency of our nature to remain absorbed in the things of earth. So meditation is the best preparation for the performance of our religious duties.

3. *Mental prayer makes the zeal of a priest efficacious.* It is from meditation that good priests draw their inspiration and zeal. From this source also they derive their love for souls and that generosity towards God which makes them real apostles.

It is in their meditations that the Holy Spirit suggests pious activities, the efforts they ought to make, and the means they ought to employ. He will inspire them with the way they should enlighten and move sinners, the way they should make fervent souls persevere and advance in perfection, the way they should increase the piety of their flock. The priest who neglects mental prayer will have only his own wisdom to guide him in the exer-

cise of his zeal. But in him who is faithful to daily meditation, the wisdom of God reinforces and completes that of the man. And a priest's exhortations will derive therefrom a divine force which no talent, no study, no eloquence can supply, which will give him a wonderful power over souls.

A man of prayer is generally recognized as such wherever he may be. In the pulpit or the confessional, at the bedside of the sick or in familiar conversation, he has a tone and an accent, as it were, that touches and moves others because it comes from the heart. His language may be simple and artless. Others may be more learned, more graceful, more eloquent. But his habit of conversing with God in prayer gives a secret power to his speech, so that God himself seems to speak and exhort by means of his words. As St. Paul said, *God as it were exhorting by us.*¹

St. Vincent de Paul did not have the eloquence of our great public speakers; he made no pretension to fine language. But he was a man of prayer, and consequently his words penetrated the souls of his hearers and made a profound impression upon them.

¹ II COR. 5²⁰

The blessed Curé of Ars had not acquired the art of oratory. He drew his inspiration from prayer; and his words possessed a power that the most eloquent masters of oratory have seldom attained.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Thou dost wish me to understand, my God, the great importance of meditation for a priest. This is the insistent teaching of my seminary life. Prayer seems to be the great exercise, the essential condition of perfection, the very soul of the spiritual life.

Am I thoroughly convinced that I must strive seriously to become a man of prayer? Have I understood that otherwise I will never be more than an indifferent priest and perhaps even less worthy of my high vocation and its sacred functions?

With what zeal have I tried to perfect myself in prayer? Have I taken special care to prepare myself properly, to remain recollected, to take away from my meditation some practical fruits in the form of resolutions, to recall these resolutions frequently during the day? Have I not often gone through this prescribed exercise in spirit of routine, going to sleep or

occupying my mind with distracting thoughts? In the absence of the support that comes from the rule and regularity of seminary life, have I not sometimes omitted meditation without any excuse whatever?

O my God, I desire to fulfill this duty more faithfully and more perfectly. I will neglect no means to become a man of prayer. Every day I will try to make my meditation in the best possible manner.

My Jesus, from thee I must receive the grace of prayer, without which my efforts are vain. Come, Holy Spirit, make my resolutions efficacious, make my will strong, active, and fruitful, establish in me that detachment from creatures and that intimate union with God which constitutes the life of prayer. *To walk with God within, says the author of the Imitation, and to be bound by no affection without, is the state of the man of interior life.*¹

I resolve, therefore:

1. To be attentive to every instruction on the subject of prayer;

2. Never to omit or abridge my meditation.

*We will give ourselves continually to prayer.*²

¹ IMIT. 2⁶

² ACTS 6⁴

V

MASS

SUMMARY

I. We will adore Jesus Christ immolating himself to his Father's glory. His eternal sacrifice is continued in heaven and on earth. We will thank our Savior for the sentiments of religion towards God and love for man that prompted his great sacrifice.

II. To appreciate the privilege of assisting at the holy sacrifice, we will consider that when we attend mass we witness the greatest event that takes place on earth, that we take part in the most perfect religious acts, and that we are enriched with abundant graces.

1. *We witness the greatest event that takes place on earth.* The mass really and substantially renews the sacrifice of Calvary, than which no greater event has ever taken place.

2. *We take part in the most perfect religious acts.* It is in the name of the whole Church that Christ renews the sacrifice of the cross. The religious duties that he offers to God are perfect. Then by union with our divine Master we should participate in the perfection of these acts.

3. *We are enriched with abundant graces.* Every time that a mass is celebrated, the Church experi-

ences a new effusion of the grace of Christ. This grace is particularly abundant for those present and assisting at the holy sacrifice.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we sufficiently appreciate the blessed privilege of assisting at mass and the importance of doing so with attention and devotion; whether we have profited as much as we should have from this daily practice. We will regret our frequent carelessness and indifference. We will ask God's forgiveness for the past and his help for the future.

We will resolve:

1. Never deliberately to stay away from daily mass;

2. Every time that we assist at mass to try to take away some fruit for ourselves and for others;

3. At the beginning of mass to renew our faith in the holy sacrifice.

So let our sacrifice be made in thy sight this day that it may please thee.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the incarnate Son of God, immolating himself to his Father's glory and offering in his own person a sacrifice in which he is both priest and victim. This august sacrifice, announced to sinful man in remotest antiquity, promised to the patriarchs, foretold by the prophets, prefigured by the mysterious rites of the Old Law, longed for by the just,

was offered up in the fulness of time on Calvary, and was consummated by the bloody immolation of the Savior of the cross.

But this sacrifice was not limited to those hours during which the divine Redeemer remained fastened to the wood of the cross. It has continued through the ages and will continue even through all eternity. It is accomplished in heaven without interruption. *And I saw*, says the beloved disciple in describing his heavenly vision, *and behold in the midst of the throne. . . a Lamb standing as it were slain.*¹ On earth Christ's sacrifice is perpetuated through the ministry of his priests under the mysterious symbols of bread and wine.

So the Sacrifice of Christ, while preserving its unity, is extended and multiplied, as it were, to infinity, and we see the realization of the prophetic words of Malachias: *In every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to my name a clean oblation. . . . saith the Lord of hosts.*²

Let us confess in the inspired words of Holy Writ: *The lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and*

¹ APOC. 5⁶

² MAL. 1¹¹

*strength, and honour, and glory, and benediction.*¹ And let us admire the divine wisdom and love that made it possible to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross by the holy sacrifice of the mass.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

As the celebration of mass is the most important act of religion, so there is no exercise of piety more sanctifying for us than devout assistance at the holy sacrifice. To appreciate this truth more fully let us consider that when we attend mass we witness the greatest, most beautiful, and most divine event that takes place on earth, that we take part in the most perfect religious acts, and that we are enriched with abundant graces.

1. *We witness the greatest, most beautiful, and most divine event that takes place on earth.* Thanks to the symbolism employed by the Church, we find in the mass a reproduction and representation of religion in its entirety. We hear the wisdom of the Old Law and the teachings of the Gospel, the hymns of the prophets and the songs of the Church.

¹ APOC. 5¹²

But the mass is more than signs or symbols or figures. It really and substantially renews the sacrifice of Calvary, of the cross, the immolation of the Word-made-flesh. My senses, it is true, perceive nothing of these great events; I discover them by faith. In place of the minister whom I see at the altar, faith shows me Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, accomplishing the sublime sacerdotal functions. In the place of ordinary bread and wine, faith shows me the body and blood of the divine Victim. All this is no image or figure of speech; it is a reality of which I can not have the slightest doubt. The mass is the true renewal of the sacrifice of the cross, the same sacrifice under a new form. But this identity supposes the same priest, the same victim, the same immolation. How sublime is this act which we witness every time we assist at holy mass! How beautiful and august is this ceremony even if carried out in the most unpretentious little chapel, on an altar modestly adorned, with no other witnesses than the child who responds to the prayers of the priest! How incomparably it surpasses the pomp and magnificence of the ancient sacrifice!

2. *We take part in the most perfect religious acts.* It was in the name of the whole Church that Christ offered to God the sacrifice of himself

on the cross. It is likewise in the name of the whole Church that he renews it on the altar. He is our victim and therefore all the religious duties that he offers to God, his adoration, praise, humiliation, expiation, petition, thanksgiving, all belong to us. To honor God worthily it is sufficient to unite ourselves in the affection of our heart to the sacred Victim, to wish to do all that he does, to enter heartily into all his thoughts, dispositions and intentions. Moreover, it is only by union with the religious acts of Christ that our acts of adoration and homage can be pleasing to God.

Now, devout and proper assistance at mass, as the Church requires, implies this union. Those who hear mass, the minister at the altar, and Christ, the true priest and victim, offer to God the same sacrifice. *Pray my brethren*, says the priest, *that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty*.¹ The faithful are united to the priest, whose words they hear and whose acts they follow religiously; the priest, in turn, is united to Christ, whom he represents and in whose name he acts; our Savior himself, called down upon the altar by the word of his minister, is

¹ ORD. OF THE MASS.

the Victim. All honor and glorify almighty God as if by a single voice and with one heart.

The religious acts that Christ offers on the altar are, on account of the hypostatic union, divine acts possessing an infinite value. Everything that he does we do and simply by union of our will to his we glorify God more excellently than we could by all the private homage we would offer in our own name.

3. *We are enriched with abundant graces.* The sacrifice of the cross, renewed on our altars, is a great source of sanctification and spiritual life. Every time that a mass is celebrated, the Church receives a new effusion of the grace of Christ. But this grace is particularly abundant for those present and assisting. The priest prays especially for them: *for all here present*, he says. Besides it is their sacrifice as well as his.

The priest who says mass can, by virtue of his intention, communicate the grace of the sacrifice to the living and the dead. So also may those who assist.

They, as well as the priest who celebrates, share in the fruits of the sacrifice. The love of God and of fellow-men is increased in the soul, supernatural habits are made more firm, the will is strengthened against temptations. This grace they can direct by special inten-

tions. The pious remembrance of those who are most dear, whether still living or expiating their faults in Purgatory, will not be fruitless during these precious moments.

Often in pious meditation I have envied the good fortune of those friends of the Master who followed him to Calvary, heard his last words, witnessed his infinite sacrifice, thus associating themselves with his atoning self-oblation. But I forget that the same privilege is mine whenever I assist at mass.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

By assisting at the holy sacrifice every day I should acquire a more lively faith and a deeper spirit of religion so that the exercise of my seminary life may be a most fruitful preparation for the lofty prerogative that I am soon to exercise.

My Jesus, thou hast consented to offer thyself to God by the hands of the priest, who thus becomes the co-operator in thy sacrifice. There is no act on the face of the earth to compare with this in grandeur.

But do I sufficiently appreciate the blessed privilege of assisting at mass? Do I regret being deprived of it? Does the sight of the

altar where my Savior offers himself fill my heart with faith, piety and love?

For a long time I have been assisting at daily mass. But what profit have I derived from this practice? My God, I could enrich my soul with thy grace hereby; I could enliven my faith and strengthen my will so as to avoid sin; I could grow strong in the virtues that my vocation demands. But I fear that my carelessness or indifference has deprived me of many of these advantages. At least I have not drawn therefrom all the benefit that I might have derived.

Forgive my past negligences, my Savior, and help me to attend mass attentively and devoutly so that, when I become a priest, I may better understand what great benefits flow from the holy sacrifice.

I resolve, therefore:

1. Never deliberately to stay away from daily mass;
2. To try always to derive some fruit for myself and for others;
3. At the beginning of the mass to renew my faith in the holy sacrifice.

So let our sacrifice be made in thy sight this day, that it may please thee.¹

¹ DAN. 3⁴⁰

VI

THE BREVIARY

SUMMARY

I. We will go in spirit to the court of heaven and listen to the songs of praise which the blessed address to the Lord. We will adore our Savior who inspired the Church to establish the divine office by which she endeavors to accomplish this same worship on earth.

II. To increase our respect for the breviary, we will consider:

1. *Its history.* Its early origin goes back to the liturgical rites of the Temple. The apostles marked out its plan in a general way; then followed a gradual development under the popes and the doctors of the Church, even till it reached its present form.

2. *Its composition.* There is the succession of divine offices which make up the liturgical year, an admirable ensemble of religion in its entirety. The beauty and diversity of the breviary extend also to its details.

3. *Its purpose.* The Church, continuing here below the mission of our Savior, wishes that her clerics in sacred orders should, by the recitation of the breviary, be representatives of Christ's eternal prayer in heaven.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we have persevered in the fervor with which we recited the breviary when first we contracted the duty, whether we do so *worthily, attentively, and devoutly*. We will implore our Lord to infuse his spirit of religion into our hearts.

We will resolve:

1. Always to recollect ourselves a few moments before reciting any part of the office in order to recall the intentions and dispositions that are proper for this holy exercise;

2. Never to omit the *Aperi Domine* at the beginning or the *Sacrosanctæ* at the end;

3. In pronouncing the words of the breviary, to avoid undue haste and especially mere mumbling into which it sometimes degenerates.

Pray without ceasing.

I. ADORATION

Let us go in spirit to the court of heaven and witness the scene portrayed by St. John in the Apocalypse. God, in his majesty, seated on a throne, *from which proceeded lightnings, and voices, and thunders*; and before him an altar on which stood the Lamb that was slain; then the mysterious living creatures, the angels, the entire company of the blessed making the vaults of heaven resound with their shouts of triumph, every one praising and blessing the Lamb that was slain and God in

whose honor it was immolated. *Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory, and honour, and power: because thou hast created all things. . . . The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom and strength, and honour, and glory, and benediction. . . . To him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction, and honour and glory, and power, for ever and ever.* And again, after God's condemnation of the symbolic Babylon is recorded, we read: *Salvation, and glory, and power, is to our God. .*

*. . . Give praise to our God, all ye his servants For the Lord our God the Almighty hath reigned. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give glory to him.*¹ Thus does the inspired word picture the blessed in heaven concerting hymns of joy by which they ceaselessly praise and bless God who gives himself to them in glory. But the earth should not be a stranger to this divine harmony. In this vale of tears as also in the courts of the heavenly city, God's praise should continually resound; from the hearts and lips of his faithful servants should ascend adoration, praise, petition, and thanksgiving. The Church endeavors to ac-

¹ APOC. 4,5

comply with this by instituting the recitation of the breviary.

Let us adore our Savior who inspired the Church to establish the divine office and who guides her in the construction of its various parts. The Holy Spirit, who governs and directs the Church, who has given a special help in the establishment of the sacred liturgy, has certainly guided her in the preparation of this form of official prayer, which occupies so large a place in the worship which she offers to God.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The history of the breviary, its composition, and the purpose for which it has been instituted should make us respect it highly and recite it worthily, attentively and devoutly.

1. *The history of the breviary.* Its early origin goes back to the liturgical rites formerly practiced in the Temple at Jerusalem, and their first establishment is hardly to be separated from the very beginning of the religion of Israel. Holy Scripture as also Jewish tradition discloses the practice of regular public prayer, well established, with divisions analogous to those of our canonical hours;

like the offices of the breviary, they were made up of psalms, lessons, and prayers.

The apostles and other early Christians, sprung from the Jewish race and having lived under the influence of its religious practices, continued for some time to take part in those public devotions. In the Book of the Acts we see them going to the Temple at the hours of prayer to join in the praises which the priests and levites were wont to address to God. This is the primitive model after which our breviary is constructed. The prayer of the synagogue, supplemented, changed, accommodated to the needs of the new cult that was to replace the old, served as a basis for the prayer of the Christian Church.

Upon this ancient and venerable foundation the apostles began to regulate the order of public prayer in the various churches which they founded, indicating in a general way the broad outline of the breviary. During the ages of persecution when the Church was struggling for her very existence, this was slowly elaborated under the direction of the bishops in their respective churches.

As soon as peace was assured to the Church, the Roman Pontiffs turned their careful attention to the regulation and unification of the

breviary. St. Damasus, St. Siricius, St. Leo the Great, St. Gelasius, St. Gregory the Great, and St. Gregory VII devoted themselves energetically to this work, rejecting certain changes that had been introduced, unifying the form of the offices, adding new ones according to the exigencies of the times, thus demonstrating that the Church in her liturgy as in her discipline, while faithfully safeguarding and cherishing her traditions, yet lives and moves. Finally St. Pius V crowned the labor of his predecessors by definitely fixing the edition of the breviary and making its recitation obligatory on all the churches.

We must not, therefore, expect to find in that book the conception of a single individual, the fruit of one man's reflections, but a work that has grown by Christian tradition, that is a true expression of the religious mind of the Church, a natural and spontaneous manifestation of her faith, her hope, her divine charity, her griefs, and her joys. Every phase and development of her inner life during the centuries is therein revealed. It is a venerable monument to which every age has contributed a share. We find reflected there the piety of holy and illustrious doctors of the Church,

such as St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, and St. Thomas Aquinas.

2. *The composition of the breviary.* In the first place, there is the succession of divine offices which make up the liturgical year, an admirable ensemble of religion in its entirety: its dogmatic truths, mysteries, precepts, worship, promises, the marvels of sanctity that it has produced; all these are presented to us in the breviary, not as abstract theories and speculations, but as concrete realities that speak to our imagination and appeal to the heart as well as to the mind.

Its very foundation is Christ, the divine Mediator, the principal object of the religious worship of the Church. The offices which compose the year draw our attention to the threefold life of our incarnate Redeemer: his mortal life, which the Church honors from Advent to Easter; his glorified life after the Resurrection, which the breviary keeps before us during Paschal time; and his mystical life in the Church, which the office of Pentecost and of the Sundays following recalls.

With this division as a general foundation, the Church celebrates the various mysteries of the Blessed Virgin. Then there are the feasts of different saints, our models, our

friends, our guardians, the glorious ornaments of the Church, the loftiest fruits of grace in the world. Each day the breviary brings before us one of these Christian heroes, recalls to our mind his life and virtues, and makes us ask of God through the intercession of the saint the grace to imitate him on earth so as one day to share his blessedness in heaven.

The beauty and diversity of the breviary extend also to its details. The office devoted to each feast does not present a monotonous, homogeneous sameness, the length and uniformity of which would be wearisome and fatiguing. But it, too, is divided into various parts, and each part has its own characteristic features, its special composition. These parts correspond to the different hours of the day and night which, as the liturgists would have us understand, should thus be sanctified by prayer. This symbolism ought to sustain our attention and arouse our piety. The diversity is further enhanced by the skillful combination of psalms, antiphons, lessons, hymns, versicles, and prayers.

But the great worth of the breviary results especially from the elements that enter into its composition. There are the psalms, forming the principal part. Never has the spirit

of man expressed the most sublime sentiments with greater nobleness of soul, with deeper feeling, with more ardor than in the poetry of the psalms. Where else are we so clearly aware of the breath of genuine inspiration and earnest enthusiasm? The thoughts are lofty, the imagery magnificent, the sentiments keen and delicate. There we find traced over and over again the infinite grandeur of God and the perfection of his works. Adoration, gratefulness, prayer, repentance, all in turn are expressed in the beauty of inspired poetry.

To these the Church adds other passages taken from Scripture or from traditional sources: such as legends of the saints, hymns, responses, etc. Undoubtedly we would be guilty of exaggeration were we to exalt these compositions as highly as the more excellent parts of the divine office. The Church, in composing the breviary, has not pretended to produce a literary work that is faultless. There are weak parts reflecting the imperfect taste of the period in which they were written. But the priest may always find in the words of the breviary a help to his piety. And beside dark and imperfect passages he will meet brilliant light and beauty of the first order.

The prayers, especially those in the Sunday

offices, are admirably simple. The responses and the antiphons are marked with characteristic naiveté. If some of the hymns have not the elegance of classical odes, yet many of them possess a beauty far superior. Of such surpassing excellence are the hymns of Christmas, of the Holy Name, of Lent, of the Passion, of the Ascension, of Pentecost, of the Blessed Sacrament, of all Saints, and that pious and soothing *Ave Maris Stella*.

3. *The purpose of the breviary.* Let us recall that Christ's work of redemption included three things: the sacrifice on the cross; the homage of a vicarious victim that he offered to God by his immolation and will continue to offer eternally; the communication of grace, the fruit of his prayer and sacrifice, to fallen and sinful man. This threefold work of the redemption should be carried on in the Church by the ministry of priests. For the Church is the mystical body of Christ who quickens it with his spirit as the soul animates the body; who through it expresses his thoughts, his sentiments, his desires; who does, by its instrumentality, visibly on earth what he does also in heaven. The priests of the Church moreover, are his representatives, his ambassadors. By their ministry it is that he accom-

plishes the divine purposes of the Church: that he perpetuates on the altar the sacrifice of the cross; that he sanctifies the souls of men; that he re-echoes his own prayer.

The place which the breviary occupies in the Church is to help accomplish this last purpose; it is the expression on earth of that prayer which Christ continually addresses to God his Father in heaven, a prayer of praise, adoration, benediction, and thanksgiving. He honors God's divine majesty more perfectly than could all creatures together. The prayer of Christ is the cause of all the blessings and graces that come down from heaven to earth, enriching the vineyard of the Church with works of holiness. And the breviary is the expression of this religious homage.

As priests are the instruments of Christ in the holy sacrifice and in applying sacramental rites, so are they also in the recitation of the breviary. To them the Church, in the name of Christ, entrusts this mission and imposes it as a daily obligation.

The recitation of the breviary, in as much as it is the public prayer of the Church, surpasses private prayers in excellence. The adoration and the petitions of the faithful which ascend to the throne of God and move his holy will,

are worthy of our respect; for they are supernatural works inspired and directed by our blessed Lord, with the power of penetrating heaven and touching the heart of God. But the breviary, since it is the official prayer of the Church addressed to God in the name of his divine Son, possesses a far greater value and is more worthy of our high esteem.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

On the day of my subdiaconate I joyfully received the breviary from the hands of the Church and accepted the obligation of reciting it every day of my life. But have I persevered in the fervor with which I fulfilled this mission at the beginning? Do I recite the divine office to-day as I used to when first I contracted the duty? Have I a genuine esteem, a true attachment for this privilege and obligation? Instead of being a source of consolation and joy, has it become a burden, an unpleasant task which I postpone as much as possible?

The Church wishes me to recite the breviary worthily, attentively, and devoutly; this is the grace I ask of God in the *Aperi Domine* before saying any part of the office. But does my recitation possess these three qualities?

For a worthy recitation of the office, not only should the exterior conditions of place and other circumstances comply with the respect due to God whom I address, but I should carefully observe the order indicated by the rubrics, with that becoming gravity and correctness which the Church requires.

To recite the office attentively, I should direct my mind to the religious act that I am performing, endeavoring to dismiss every distraction and preoccupation that may solicit my attention.

To recite it devoutly I myself ought to feel the sentiments expressed by the words of the liturgy so as, when praying in the name of Christ, to join in the religious homage that he renders to God.

Does not a self-examination reveal many negligences, some of them perhaps become habitual, in reciting my breviary? If so, I ought humbly to reproach myself and resolve henceforth to be more faithful in the performance of this sacred duty.

My Savior, since thou dost wish me to be thy representative, thy mouth-piece as it were, in fulfilling this duty of prayer on earth, infuse into my heart the spirit of religion with which thy own is filled. Give me a deep

appreciation of the greatness and majesty of God, for this is an essential condition of the respect with which I should recite the divine office. Or rather, dear Lord, do thou come to me thyself, dwell within my soul, directing its faculties in the holy exercise of prayer. May I thus merit one day to unite my praise and adoration to that of the angels and the saints in heaven.

I resolve:

1. Always to recollect myself a few moments before reciting any part of the office in order to recall the intentions and dispositions that are proper to this holy exercise;

2. Never to omit the *Aperi Domine* at the beginning and the *Sacrosanctæ* at the end;

3. In pronouncing the words of the breviary, to avoid undue haste and especially mere mumbling into which it sometimes degenerates.

*Pray without ceasing.*¹

VII

SPIRITUAL READING

SUMMARY

I. We will adore God in his merciful condescension enlightening us by the inspired word of Holy Scripture. The word of God is also contained, in a certain way, in spiritual books. We will thank our Lord for providing us with this additional means of sanctification.

II. We will consider the contents of spiritual books under three divisions.

1. *Rules of perfection.* Above the science of moral theology there is another more lofty: we call it asceticism. The priest, not only for his own perfection, but also for the guidance of others, needs to know the rules established by ascetic theology.

2. *Motives of conduct.* The teaching of spiritual books appeals to the heart even more than to the mind. These writings point out the joys and attractions of the spiritual life as well as the difficulties to be overcome. As a sort of preaching, they arouse in us the courage and good will required to practice sanctity. And they have all the advantages of the written over the spoken word.

3. *The example of holy lives.* Books of piety offer us, as admirable models, the heroic virtues of the saints. We see them struggling against the same difficulties that confront us.

III. If we have not heretofore taken full advantage of this means of sanctification, we will ask our Lord to forgive our neglect and to help us acquire a sincere fondness for pious reading.

We will resolve:

1. So far as possible, to devote at least half an hour a day to spiritual reading;

2. To try always to draw some profitable and holy thought from such reading.

Listen in silence to the words of the saints.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God in his merciful condescension enlightening us by the inspired word of Holy Scripture. Having addressed us by the mouth of the prophets, he spoke to us by the Son, that is by his Word clothed in our flesh. As we read in the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all, in these days hath spoken to us by his Son.*¹

Our blessed Lord, having come into our midst as the divine sower to spread over the earth

¹ HEB. 1¹⁻²

the seed of his word, has entrusted the continuation of this work to his apostles, who indeed consecrated their lives to the spreading of his precious seed in the world. *Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth: and their words unto the ends of the world.*¹

It is this word which is contained in the Gospels and in the writings of the apostles where it is presented in its authentic form. But it is also commented upon, explained, applied to every situation and every state of life, in other spiritual books which form a priceless treasure in the possession of the Church.

These books contain, in a certain way, the word of God, and through them our divine Master speaks to us. While they have not, to be sure, the same authority as Holy Scripture, which is the fruit of divine inspiration, yet surely the Holy Spirit has assisted the authors by a special help, he has enlightened their minds, he has utilized their pen as an instrument to spread his divine teaching. Most of the writers who have composed spiritual books were saints; it was after prayer and contemplation that they wrote, putting in

¹ Ps. 18⁶

their books not so much their personal thoughts as those which they had drawn from converse with God. Hence the reverence with which we should receive their teaching.

Spiritual reading is, therefore, always placed among the exercises prescribed for those striving after perfection. It is the complement of prayer, to which it is a considerable help by suggesting to a soul the thoughts that may become the object of its meditation. All religious communities, wherein we find provided the best helps to a perfect life, practice it, and all masters of spirituality unanimously advise it.

Let us thank our Lord for giving us this means of sanctification. Let us ask for the grace to understand its value that we may faithfully practice it throughout our lives.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

That we may more clearly appreciate the usefulness of spiritual reading, let us consider the contents of spiritual books under three divisions: rules of perfection, motives of conduct, and examples of holy lives.

1. *Rules of perfection.* Above the science of moral theology, which teaches how to live

according to the laws of God, there is another and more lofty science the object of which is perfection. We call it *asceticism* when it merely sets forth the virtues which we should practice, the spiritual exercises to which we should devote ourselves, the obstacles that we must avoid in order to acquire holiness. And we call it *mystical theology* when it describes the supernatural states to which God is pleased to raise certain souls, whether to reward them for generosity in his service or to manifest in them the abundant treasures of his grace.

Like all sciences, asceticism has its definitions and its divisions; it has general principles from which particular conclusions and practical rules are deduced; it has its proofs drawn from authority, from reason, and from our own experience; it marks out the methodical way to be followed in prayer, in the examination of conscience, and in the effort to detach ourselves from sin and unite ourselves to God by love.

Anyone who wishes to be perfect must learn this science, for which even the most generous good will is not a complete and adequate substitute. Deprived of this guiding light, we are like travelers traversing an unknown region, where we are in danger of going

astray and being lost: we will not be forewarned against the illusions to which souls that wish to serve God in a perfect manner are often exposed, nor will we be prepared for the temptations that await us and the trials of one sort or another which God uses to purify and strengthen our souls.

But this science is especially necessary for those whom the Holy Spirit has placed in the Church to be the directors and guides of the faithful. What priest is there who will not meet, in the course of his ministry, some chosen souls whom God calls to perfection, perhaps some that the Holy Ghost leads by extraordinary ways? Such persons will come to ask advice, to expose their doubts and difficulties. How can a priest serve them as he ought, how can he give them wise and enlightened direction if he is a stranger to the rules of the perfect life and to the principles of asceticism?

Since the very first and principal object of spiritual books is to set forth these rules and principles methodically, every priest should read them and meditate on them. They will thus become the complement to the study of moral theology from which no priest may conscientiously excuse himself.

2. *Motives of conduct.* The teaching of spiritual books, unlike the treatises of theology, does not consist of dry, abstract, strictly scientific exposition. It appeals to the heart even more than to the mind. It instructs, but more especially it exhorts. It points out the way; but at the same time, by forcible considerations, by persuasive motives, urges us to pursue that course courageously, without allowing ourselves to be repelled or disheartened by whatever difficulties we may encounter. While making us acquainted with the arduous path of perfection, these writings do not fail to show us its attractions, to make us see that generous devotion in the service of God will procure for us greater consolation and more real happiness than all human satisfactions can hope to do. In the words of the Imitation: *If there be joy in the world, truly the man of pure heart possesseth it.*¹ Who can read, for instance, the writings of St. Francis de Sales without feeling drawn to the practice of piety?

Spiritual books are a sort of preaching; and thus do they answer a need of our soul that is even more urgent than is our need of instruc-

¹ IMIT. 2^d

tion. We lack not so much the knowledge of what we ought to do to become a saint, but rather the courage and good will that is required. It is necessary for us to be spurred on and exhorted when we are faint-hearted, to be awakened when we sleep, to have our fervor aroused when we grow lukewarm. Spiritual reading will recall the motives that stimulate our fidelity to the duties we must fulfill: it will, by bringing to our mind the decrees of divine justice, instil a salutary fear into our soul; by reminding us of God's infinite goodness and mercy, of the benefits we have received from his bounty and those which he promises to us, it will move our heart to love him more and more.

Spiritual reading is thus, as it were, a sermon. But it has certain advantages over a sermon. The word that strikes our ear is transient; it may make an impression on our soul, it may inspire generous and sincere resolutions: but so often these happy effects do not endure; we forget what we have heard. realizing in ourselves the words of St. James: *If a man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass. For he beheld*

*himself, and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was.*¹

But when we read we can pause as long as we desire to consider what we have read, to make its impression more penetrating and durable. And then the book is always there: we can mark its most striking passages, the words that appeal to us most directly, and we can come back to it. In this way spiritual reading may become for us, as it has for many others, a most effective means of sanctification.

3. *The examples of holy lives.* Books of piety are not confined to expositions of what constitutes holiness and to exhortations to seek perfection. They set forth most admirable models, confirming the principles which they advance by the heroic virtues of the saints; they point to the example of those holy men and women who, by overcoming obstacles and temptations, by making great sacrifices, progressed in the way of perfection. We see the saints of God struggling against the same difficulties that confront us, mortifying their passions, often stronger than ours, courageously overcoming their natural weaknesses, profiting by all the means of sancti-

¹ ST. JAMES 1²²⁻³⁴

fication which God bestows upon them. Thus presented, these examples are surely well calculated to arouse us from the torpor into which we are apt to fall, to show us that the maxims of perfection can be realized by mortal man, to inspire us with a strong resolution to enter upon the work of our perfection with generous ardor.

As the force of example is more eloquent than the language of admonition, so the lives of the saints constitute a more effective exhortation than ordinary books of piety. What makes us ashamed of our laxity more than the picture of a martyr's courage, the self-denial of a confessor, the purity of a virgin? The spiritual beauty of these Christian heroes, so far above those whom the world glorifies, arouses in us a zealous desire to imitate them. And is not the contemplation of heaven, which is the crown of their labors, a powerful encouragement in the practice of virtue?

It should not be a matter of surprise to us, then, that the reading of the lives of the saints has brought about so many conversions from a sinful life to one of virtue. How many have been rescued from the service of worldly vanities; how many, through the reading of the virtues practiced by the saints, have in turn become saints themselves! And who among

us, after reading one of those inspiring biographies, does not feel better, more deeply penetrated with the love of our Savior, more firmly determined to make whatever sacrifices God asks?

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Have I not reason to humble myself before thee, my God, considering the little care I have taken to be faithful to this exercise of spiritual reading? Have I not often neglected it from mere sloth? It may be that the beauties of poetry, the masterpieces of secular eloquence, the dramas of history, or the speculations of science and philosophy are full of interest for me. How does it happen that it is not so with the books that speak of thee, dear Lord, of thy greatness, thy kindness, thy mercy, thy goodness? Whence comes it that the life of thy friends attracts me less than that of great men of the world? To read about the deeds of these latter is a satisfaction for my curiosity rather than a great contribution to my spiritual betterment; whereas books of piety will teach me to love thee, my God, and to sanctify my immortal soul.

And when I have been faithful to spiritual reading, how have I performed this exercise?

Have I pursued my reading solely for the purpose of edification and sanctification, putting aside all idle curiosity, even taking care not to permit the desire to instruct myself be the chief end of my reading, always making my instruction serve my sanctification? Before my reading and during it have I invoked the Holy Spirit to penetrate my soul with the doctrine of salvation?

My God, since it is thy teaching which comes to us through books of piety, give me a sincere fondness for them. Grant that I may find therein light and encouragement in my efforts to grow in holiness.

I resolve:

1. So far as possible to devote at least half an hour a day to spiritual reading;
2. To try always to draw some profitable and holy thought from such reading.

*Listen in silence to the words of the saints.*¹

¹ IMIT. 1⁵

VIII

VISIT TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

SUMMARY

- I. We will make an act of faith in the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, particularly in the permanence of that presence in our tabernacles. We will thank our blessed Lord for so precious a treasure, uniting our praise and adoration to that of the saints and angels in heaven.
- II. We will consider the following reasons why we should visit the Blessed Sacrament.

1. *To offer homage to our Lord.* This form of adoration pleases him because it is offered only by fervent souls, because in the solitude of the tabernacle he is more deserted than on the occasions of public devotions, and because it supposes a purer faith and a more perfect appreciation of the great mystery of his love.

2. *To be associated with Christ's acts of religious worship.* By faith we know that there is Christ with all his perfections, all his divine mysteries, that he there offers to God a more perfect act of homage than has ever been offered by any creature and that he would have us participate therein. But this purpose is fittingly accomplished by the visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

3. *To receive the spiritual life that is there communicated to us.* This life we receive par excellence by holy communion. But a spiritual communion is effected between Christ and us when we visit him and worship at his feet before the tabernacle.

III. We will rejoice to think that many devoted friends of the Savior delight in remaining near the tabernacle. We will reproach ourselves for negligence and for many imperfections in our visits.

We will resolve:

1. Not to omit the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament;

2. To seek in these visits light and strength and consolation.

Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum.

I. ADORATION

Let us make a sincere act of faith in the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Following the teaching of the Church, my Jesus, in reliance on thy infallible word and in union with the undoubted tradition of the Christian ages, I firmly believe that in thy love for men thou hast willed to remain among them under the sacramental veil. This marvel of thy love is beyond my understanding but I adhere to it as one of the fundamental articles of Christian belief.

The priest, bending over the altar, utters the consecrating words which the Church places on his lips, and at once the bread in his hands becomes the adorable body of God's incarnate Son, immolated anew for our sins. This sacred victim the priest offers to God, receives in holy communion, and distributes to the faithful who approach the altar. Then genuflecting before the ciborium that contains the consecrated particles, he covers it and reverently places it in the tabernacle where Christ continues to remain for the consolation of his friends, truly *Emmanuel*, God with us.

Those outside the true fold, whose minds are obscured by error, deny this abiding presence of Christ under the sacred species. Even some who believe in the real presence admit it only from the moment of consecration to the communion. What remains after that is no longer the Lord's body, they say, but merely bread which has no more claim to our respect than that served at table. The Church has condemned this error and teaches as a dogma of faith that Christ really abides there so long as the sacred species remain unchanged.

Christ is, then, present to the Church on earth as well as to the Church in heaven, the difference being in the manner of his presence.

There he is known by the blessed and the angels in the fulness of his glory; his humanity is more resplendent than it was at his Transfiguration, his adorable features are unveiled. He is also really present in the Eucharist but we do not see him; it is faith that discloses his presence.

We thank thee, dear Lord, for so precious a treasure, uniting our praise and adoration to that of the saints and angels in heaven: *To him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction, and honour, and glory, and power, for ever and ever.*¹ And with the Church on earth we offer up that beautiful prayer of St. Thomas:

*Adoro te devote latens Deitas,
Quæ sub his figuris vere latitas:
Tibi se cor meum totum subjicit,
Quia te contemplans totum deficit.*

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider the following reasons why our Lord remains present in the tabernacle: to receive our homage, to associate us in his acts of religion, and to communicate his life to us.

¹ APOC. 5¹⁹

1. *We should visit the Blessed Sacrament to render homage to our Lord.* In heaven he receives the adoration of saints and angels. And should he not justly expect us to render homage to him in the sacrament of his love? Wherever Christ is present and under whatever form, he always deserves our adoration and honor. But of all the acts of homage that we can offer him in the Eucharist, the visit is especially dear to his sacred heart.

This form of adoration pleases him because it is offered by fervent souls. In the crowds which throng our churches at Sunday mass, among those who claim to be followers of Christ and call themselves good Catholics, although doubtless there are many devout worshippers, yet how many indifferent, unbelieving, ungrateful? But in the group that we see piously kneeling before the tabernacle, there are only friends of our divine Master. His looks fall on those who sincerely purpose to remain ever faithful to him and who cheerfully come to offer a testimony of their love.

Christ in the solitude of the tabernacle is more deserted than on the occasions of public devotions. When the Church, to honor his presence in the Holy Eucharist, employs the magnificence of her liturgical ceremonies, pre-

senting the Blessed Sacrament in solemn exposition to the adoration of the faithful, honoring it with sacred music, carrying it in triumphal procession under richly ornamented canopy, the house of God is filled with worshippers who bow in humble adoration.

But outside these solemn occasions, when the crowd has departed even to the last individual, when the strains of music have finally ceased, when the tabernacle door has been closed and secured, and the lights, one by one, have been extinguished, after the triumph, what desertion, what solitude!

Places of amusement and marts of business overflow with people; the streets near the church may be filled with a noisy crowd: but Christ in the tabernacle is so often left alone. Surely the heart of our divine Master is moved by the devotion of those who come to visit him, thus reminding him, as it were, that, if deserted by the great majority of men, he has nevertheless some faithful adorers.

And this worship is dear to Christ's sacred heart because it supposes a purer faith and a more perfect appreciation of the great mystery of his love. It can not be the pomp and elaborate ceremonial of the Church's ritual that attracts us. There is only the closed taber-

nacle, perhaps quite devoid of material elegance, with a single lamp burning before it—that is all we see. We are drawn thither by Christ's own sacramental presence to offer adoration and praise and thanks and petition and atonement to his sacred heart.

2. *We should visit the Blessed Sacrament to be associated with Christ's acts of religious worship.* The sacred host appears to us as something without life, motionless, inert, silent. By faith we know that there is Christ with all his perfections, all his divine mysteries. Of all the wonders of his Eucharistic life, first and foremost is the worship which he pays to God. In heaven he honors God in the bosom of the Church triumphant and he has willed likewise to honor him on earth in the Church militant. There, in the solitude of the tabernacle, his religious worship is a more perfect act of homage to God than has ever been offered by any creature. Just as the incarnate Word makes participate in his religious acts all the elect in heaven who adore God in him, by him, and with him, so too he would have the faithful on earth associate themselves with the acts of worship by which in the sacred host he gives honor to God, so that heaven and earth should join together in blessing and praising God unceasingly.

This purpose is accomplished quite fittingly by the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. After adoring our Savior there present, after contemplating his marvelous life in the Eucharist, our chief occupation during the moments spent in his presence, should be to unite ourselves to him in order to do all that he does, to will all that he wills, to say to God all that he says, to adore and love and glorify God with him, to enter into the full extent of his religious acts so far as we can understand them, to associate ours therewith, and thus to make of our devotion and that of Christ one and the same act of worship.

Of ourselves we are unable to honor God's divine majesty as it deserves; for there are numerous imperfections in our acts of religion. And even when we make them with the greatest fervor, how far they are from God's infinite majesty! Not so, however, with the worship that emanates from the soul of Christ. From his divine person they derive an infinite value which is, in a way, imparted to our acts when we associate ourselves with him. And our worship, in spite of its intrinsic defects, is pleasing to God.

3. *We should visit the Blessed Sacrament to receive the spiritual life that is there communi-*

cated to us. The great purpose of our Lord in the Eucharist is to give himself to us, to be united to our souls, and thereby enrich us with the infinite treasures of light, of grace, of holiness, which he possesses to an eminent degree. This he accomplishes par excellence by means of holy communion wherein he becomes our spiritual nourishment. And similarly he favors those who visit him and worship at his feet before the tabernacle. On these occasions there is effected between Christ and the soul a spiritual communion by which he increases sanctifying grace in it, communicates to it his divine strength, consoles it in trial, and makes it feel the unspeakable sweetness of his presence. To the crowds that followed to hear his words, he said: *Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.*¹ These same words he repeats to us from the depths of the tabernacle. He is there with his treasures of graces and longs to impart them to us. Seeing our suffering, our weakness, our failings, our struggles, our earnest efforts, our need of his help, he calls us to his feet that he may bestow bounteous gifts upon us.

¹ ST. MATTH. 11²⁸

Happy is the soul that heeds this invitation; happy the priest who has learned to find in the visit to the Most Holy a source of priceless treasures. We may well doubt whether in the course of the whole day, saving the holy sacrifice, there are any moments more holily and profitably employed. From these visits will our zeal be inflamed and our ministry become successful. We know that holy priests have recourse to the Blessed Eucharist in their deepest anguish, their difficulties, all their trials. *Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace: that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid.*¹

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Can I appreciate and imitate those devoted friends of Christ whose delight it is to remain near the tabernacle, who pass long periods there without weariness, who regret to leave even when other duties call them away? I know there are many such not only in the cloister but also in the world, not only in the ranks of the clergy but likewise among the laity.

¹ HEB. 4¹⁰

In the widespread indifference of these days, my Savior, there are some who love thee; if their numbers be not great, at least their devotion is fervent: in them is the hope of the future. Thou dost abide in many tabernacles and near each are some faithful adorers. We may trust confidently that this little seed will grow into a great tree, that this spark will be enkindled into a vast flame.

But what is my part in this so Christian and priestly devotion? How have I heeded thy summons to join thy worshippers in adoring thee, present in our tabernacles? Have I seriously regarded the visit to the Blessed Sacrament as an important daily exercise? Sometimes, without excuse or pretext, have I not omitted or abridged it, as though begrudging the moments consecrated to the visit to my Lord? And during the time that I spend before the tabernacle, am I recollected, seeking to offer those acts to my Savior that he expects of me: adoring him, joining in the dispositions of his sacred heart, striving by fervent prayer to draw his grace to my soul?

I reproach myself, dear Lord, with many negligences in the fulfillment of this duty, and I humbly beg thee to renew in my soul an earnest devotion to the Eucharist, to arouse

my faith, my piety, my love, and my confidence towards the sacrament of thy love.

I resolve:

1. Not to omit the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament;

2. To seek in these visits light and strength and consolation.

*Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum! concupiscit et deficit anima meu in atria Domini.*¹

¹ PSAL 83²

IX

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore the Holy Spirit of Christ living in the Church to guide the souls of men and teach them the ways of perfection. Under his guidance the holy doctors of the Church have unanimously proclaimed the necessity of examination of conscience. And the example of the saints demonstrates the usefulness of this exercise. We will thank our Lord for this light.
- II. We will consider the following advantages to be derived from the practice of examining our conscience.
 1. *It keeps us humble*; for it makes known to us numerous weaknesses, imperfections, faults that are multiplied daily. It will also disclose evil inclinations and passions the germ of which we carry in our heart. And it makes us realize our powerlessness to do good without God's help.
 2. *It fortifies us against sin*, because it destroys the influence of the commonest causes of our sins strengthening us against the enticement of the senses or the impulse of the passions, against sudden temptations that often take us by surprise, and against illusory attractions of sin.

3. *It incites us to strive for perfection.* It helps us to perceive the supernatural inspirations which God's Holy Spirit breathes into our soul. Thus will we discover our dominant inclination or attraction, that by which God reveals our vocation to us. And thus, too, will we be led to practice in a special manner such or such a virtue, such a particular devotion.

III. We will ask ourselves in what manner we examine our conscience every week before confession; and whether we conform to the recommendation of our rule to make three examinations of conscience daily: at the morning meditation, at noon, and at night prayers. We will humbly ask of God the grace to know ourselves.

We will resolve:

1. To apply the utmost seriousness to the examination of conscience:

2. To determine upon a subject for our personal, particular examen.

If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

Stand before yourself as before another.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the Holy Spirit of Christ living in the Church to guide the souls of men and teach them the ways of perfection. Not only is he, by the grace which he bestows, the principle and source of all true holiness, but he is also the divine teacher by reason of the

light which he gives us and the examples that he places before us. He has likewise given us by the pen of spiritual writers an admirable commentary upon the rules and maxims of perfection contained in Holy Writ, setting forth the exercises we should follow if we would conform our life to that standard.

The holy doctors of the Church are unanimous in proclaiming the necessity of examination of conscience for all who wish to surmount their evil passions and become firmly rooted in virtuous habits. St. Gregory regarded fidelity to this exercise as a characteristic trait of God's elect; and St. John Chrysostom counsels us thus to conclude each day of our life.

The examination of conscience has its place, therefore, in every religious community. And to make its practice more profitable, the rule of the seminary prescribes, besides the general examen which embraces all our acts, a particular examen to concentrate our attention on some special point and thereby lead us more surely and effectively to a thorough knowledge of ourselves.

The saints plainly demonstrate by the example of their lives the usefulness of this exercise. It was by assiduity and faithfulness to this examen that they came to possess a deli-

cate discernment of their heart's slightest tendencies.

Let us thank our blessed Lord for making known to us in these different ways the value we should attach to the daily examination of conscience.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider the following advantages to be derived from the faithful practice of this exercise: it keeps us humble; it fortifies us against sin; it incites us to strive for perfection.

1. *It keeps us humble.* Humility is neither more nor less than a true regard for our own nothingness, our weakness, based upon the honest knowledge of ourselves. If we would not blind ourselves as to our real state, if we would know ourselves as God knows us, we would not be inclined to that self-infatuation which produces pride, nor to that immoderate longing for praise and esteem which constitutes vanity, nor to that excessive self-confidence which engenders presumption; in short we would be humble.

But this valuable knowledge is acquired by sincere examination of conscience and can not possibly be obtained otherwise. When we penetrate into the depths of our souls to explore

all its recesses, to discover its mysteries, what do we find? At the surface of this interior world of our spiritual being we come upon numerous weaknesses, imperfections, faults that are multiplied daily. And so we must needs acknowledge before God that we are guilty of many sins. We discover the more or less voluntary omission of duties that we should have fulfilled, negligences that would have been avoided by a little more reflection, distractions at our prayers, lesser acts of sensuality, a great deal of egotism and self-seeking, whims that we have not had the courage to sacrifice, self-complacency or vain-glory, loss of time, lack of charity in our speech. When we make careful scrutiny of our acts, we are surprised to find how few are without defect, whether substantially or in the circumstances.

If we penetrate farther into our soul, we will be still more humbled. For we find evil inclinations, passions to which, perhaps, we do not adhere, which we may even bravely combat, but the living germ of which we carry in our heart. These wicked tendencies that ever urge us to sin, we do not discern without reflection. They will not, however, escape a thorough examination, by which we perceive in them the source of spiritual warfare, a peril

never remote. Sometimes we are astonished at the expressions of humility uttered by God's saints and we are almost ready to question their sincerity. But the saints knew themselves well; and, while thanking God for not having permitted them to fall into great crimes clearly understood that, left to themselves, they would have been capable of the most heinous.

The examination of conscience furnishes a further motive of humility by making us realize our powerlessness to do good without God's help. A glance at our soul shows us an intellect that perceives truth and a will, master of itself, exercising sovereign independence. Yet from a more painstaking view we learn that neither this intellect nor this will belongs absolutely to us; God bestowed them upon us and in their exercise as well as for their being they depend entirely upon him.

2. *It fortifies us against sin.* Although it may not make us avoid all faults, which are, so to speak, part of our nature, yet at least it makes them less frequent; and it saves us from grievous sins which not merely weaken charity within us but quite destroy it.

The sins into which we are apt to fall are occasioned sometimes by the enticement of

the senses or the impulse of the passions, sometimes by sudden temptations against which we are not on our guard, sometimes by illusory attractions. But the examination of conscience is a protection from this threefold danger.

By it we discover our *evil inclinations*, those in particular which exercise a sway over the others and which, because of their violence, expose us more immediately to the danger of falling. Thus we are better prepared to combat the interior enemies of our soul. If the passions are not perceived in their infancy, they will grow stronger under cover of the darkness of our ignorance. Weak, at first, they can be easily checked if we perceive them in time. Hence the importance of discerning them at their very inception.

To be armed against the surprise of *sudden temptation* we need to be forewarned; or rather if we are forewarned we will not be taken by surprise. But a soul that exercises no watchfulness over itself, that takes no account of past falls, of its present weakness, or of dangers which are to be encountered in the future, a soul that does not examine itself has much to fear from surprise. If, on the other hand, by serious examination of conscience every day, we observe our course, not only enumerating

our faults but seeking to discover their occasions and the causes of our defects, we are fortified, as well as can be, against sudden and unexpected temptation.

Examination of conscience secures us against *illusory attractions* that often lead us into fatal consequences. A frequent self-deception is that regarding the state of our soul, whereby we think ourselves to be in the grace of God although really in the bondage of sin. Like the tare in the gospel parable which was sowed in the field while the servants slept, so sin at times invades our soul. We neglect to correct light faults which do not, indeed, rob us of God's grace, but gradually dull our delicacy of conscience and destroy our consciousness of sin. To these faults succeed others more grievous; and so by an imperceptible decline our soul falls into the depths of mortal sin, almost without being aware. Says the Holy Ghost by the mouth of the apostle: *I know thy works, that thou hast the name of being alive: and thou art dead.*¹

This will not happen to us if we examine our conscience faithfully every day. For then our least imperfections will be manifest to us,

¹ APOC. 3¹

our heart will render an exact account of its secrets, the beginnings of dangerous tendencies will be promptly recognized.

3. *It incites us to strive for perfection.* The work of developing and perfecting the interior life consists first in uprooting the attachments that make our heart imperfect in God's sight and lead us on to grievous sin; and secondly in corresponding constantly with the grace of God's Holy Spirit, the light which he vouchsafes to us and the inspirations that he breathes into our soul.

To accomplish this noble Christian purpose, we must have recourse to the examination of conscience. It is this exercise of piety that helps us to perceive in the depths of our soul even the slight movements of those two lives within us, the natural and the supernatural. It will not suffice that we notice merely our evil inclinations. There are, in a loftier realm, the supernatural attractions of divine grace, the source of all virtues.

We have a dominant inclination or attraction which gives a direction to our whole life and by which God reveals our vocation to us. By studying this and our dispositions regarding it, we can learn whether God wishes us to serve him in the holy priesthood or to seek the

treasure of sanctity in the cloister or by the ordinary way of a career in the world.

There are other attractions that manifest God's will in regard to certain important matters concerning our sanctification or the interests of our neighbor: perhaps a virtue that we feel called to practice in a special manner, a pious exercise on which it seems that our progress towards spiritual perfection depends, a work of zeal that God asks of us. Moreover, if, by habitual examination of conscience, we thoroughly enter into ourselves, we will hear an inner voice telling us, at each crisis and for each detail of our life, what we ought to do.

The saints have always followed these supernatural attractions with great docility. Here is to be found the secret of their eminent holiness. They acted and spoke, not under the influence of natural instincts, but directed by the supernatural light of grace which, because their interior life was an open book to them, they were able to discern with a fine delicacy.

Meditation and spiritual reading place before us the motives which should make us generous in God's service: but examination of conscience shows us what that generosity requires of us; it supplies to our will, so to speak, the material for its acts of virtue.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Each week, when the time comes to present myself at the holy tribunal of penance, there to avow my sins and receive absolution, I examine my conscience so as not to receive the sacrament of penance without this preparation. But in what manner do I perform this duty; and is that the limit of my self-examination?

According to our method of mental prayer we have to turn our eyes upon our own soul before the close of each meditation. With what fidelity have I carried out this recommendation?

In our prayers at the close of each day, some moments are set aside for the examination of conscience. How have I employed them?

Conformable to the practice of religious communities, the seminary rule prescribes also a particular examen. Have I been faithful to apply this examination to the personal needs of my own soul?

Let us humbly ask our Lord to pardon our negligences in this exercise. And let us acknowledge that such neglect is one of the causes why our spiritual progress is not greater. Finally let us beg our Savior to vouchsafe the

light of his grace, without which we can not hope to acquire a perfect knowledge of ourselves, saying, in St. Augustine's words: *Lord that I might know myself.*¹

I resolve:

1. To apply the utmost seriousness to the examination of conscience;

2. To determine upon a subject for my particular, personal examen.

*If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.*²

*Stand before yourself as before another.*³

¹ SOLILOQ. 2

² I COR. 11³¹

³ ST. BERNARD: *Med.* 5

X

THE ROSARY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore God's Holy Spirit as the author and propagator of the pious devotion which we call the rosary. We will admire how it helps the piety of the most elevated souls as also of the simplest. We will thank God for this cherished gift.

II. We will consider the purpose for which the rosary was instituted, the prayers that compose it, and the mysteries applied to them.

1. *Its purpose:* namely, to glorify the Blessed Virgin and obtain God's grace through her intercession. Hence its place among the exercises prescribed by the seminary rule.

2. *The prayers that compose it:* the Apostles' Creed, that ancient and venerable profession of faith; the Our Father, received by the Church from our Savior himself; the Hail Mary, which forms its main part, repeating the Angelic salutation; the doxology, by which we recall that God is the source of all Mary's greatness.

3. *The mysteries* to which the rosary readily lends itself by its very institution and form. They are the sublimest of our holy religion. And they correspond to the successive stages of our spiritual life.

III. We will rejoice that for a long time the recitation of the beads has been a habit of our daily life. However, we will ask ourselves whether haste, routine, and lack of devotion have not deprived us of the fruits which we might have obtained therefrom. We will finally promise our Blessed Mother, with God's help, to bring greater fervor to this pious exercise.

We will resolve:

1. To remain faithful to the daily recitation of the rosary;

2. To do so with greater attention and devotion.

Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, pray for us.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God's Holy Spirit as the author and propagator of the pious devotion which we call the rosary. Having inspired St. Dominic to institute it in whose hands it became a powerful instrument of zeal for the conversion of heretics, he blessed it so richly that very soon this form of prayer had attained a most consoling progress in the Church. Of the devotions established among the faithful in honor of the Blessed Virgin, there is none more popular and dearer to the heart of Catholics.

We find saints of God practicing this devotion with great fidelity. St. Francis de Sales

and many others before and after him vowed to recite the rosary every day. For a long time it has been the practice of all who make any profession of piety to say the rosary and also to carry their beads continually about them.

By the most elevated as by the simplest souls, the rosary is cherished as a precious help to their piety. These latter, often unable to read or to practice mental prayer, can, however, recite their beads and let this replace those other forms of prayer. The rosary is their prayer-book; they pass the beads between their fingers when assisting at mass or at their visits to the Blessed Sacrament: it becomes for them a résumé of the exercises of Christian piety.

Impressed by that immense popularity of the rosary, the Popes have encouraged it in every way. They have exhorted the faithful to recite it often and, to stimulate the practice, have opened the spiritual treasury of the Church to those who follow those exhortations.

Let us thank God for the gift of the rosary and ask him to place in our heart a sincere attraction for it that we may daily recite it with recollection and fervor.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider the purpose for which the rosary has been instituted, the prayers of which it is composed, and the mysteries which are applied to them.

1. *The purpose.* While the Count De Montfort was meeting the Albigenses with armed forces, St. Dominic was endeavoring to convert the heretics by a peaceful crusade. Having exhausted all the industrious attempts of a most ardent zeal, he was inspired to entrust the success of the enterprise to the Mother of God. For this purpose he established in her honor a new form of prayer, destined to spread her devotion in the districts disturbed by the error and to implore her powerful intercession in their behalf. It is thus the rosary was founded, and history tells us what marvelous success that apostle obtained by its means.

The purpose of the rosary was, therefore, to glorify Mary and to obtain God's grace through her intercession. To this end has the practice of reciting the beads spread over the entire world; for which reason likewise it should appeal to our piety. Whatever pertains to the Blessed Virgin is dear to us. We love her feasts, we venerate her images, we daily recite

many invocations in her honor, we ask her to bless our studies and our recreations, we entrust our pious resolutions to her, in short we profess to belong to her and through her would we go to her divine Son. Now, among the practices that honor her, the rosary without doubt holds the first rank. It is not a short prayer, a brief invocation that we address to her at the beginning or end of one of our daily acts, but a special exercise entirely consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, an expression of the devotion that we have vowed to her, of the singular trust we have in her intercession. Hence, according to the seminary rule, the rosary has its place among the exercises of the day.

2. *The prayers.* There exists for the use of the faithful a vast number of prayers in which we find ample variety of expressions which manifest the confidence produced by the Holy Ghost in the children of the Church towards God, towards Mary, towards the angels, and towards the saints. The sacred liturgy contains an inexhaustible treasury, in addition to which are others, the fruit of individual piety, and among these latter are many sanctioned and indulgenced by the authority of the Church. And we can say without exaggeration that

none of these expressions of Christian piety equal the excellent formulas of the rosary.

In the first place it contains an act of faith, expressed by the *Apostles' Creed*: that familiar summary of the truths which every Christian must believe in order to be saved; a sacred formula which the martyrs, in order to strengthen their courage, were wont to repeat in the midst of their tortures, which the faithful include in their morning and night prayers, and which we will be happy to pronounce with our dying lips to animate our confidence at the final struggle of life.

There is, in the second place, the *Our Father*, received by the Church from our Savior himself. Christ it was who taught it to the apostles for their instruction and ours. This most authentic, holiest, and most divine of all prayers besides being incomparably simple, beautiful, precise, is a substantial abridgment of all the religious acts that we address to God. Six times we repeat it while saying the beads.

The rosary was instituted especially to honor the blessed Mother of God; and hence we recite the *Hail Mary* fifty-three times, which thus forms its principal part. The Hail Mary is, among the prayers addressed to the Blessed Virgin, what the *Our Father* is among those

addressed directly to God. In the first part we salute her by the self-same words with which the Archangel Gabriel addressed her, our most beautiful homage to the Queen of Heaven. Therein we honor the fulness of grace which God bestowed upon her, the special divine assistance that was her prerogative, the singular and preëminent privilege of being the mother of our Redeemer. The second part is the invocation of her intercession under the glorious title of Mother of God, imploring her help particularly for the hour of death.

Lastly the *doxology*, by which the Church concludes the psalms of her office, is repeated at the end of each decade. The Holy Trinity is the source of all the Blessed Virgin's greatness and of all the graces that we receive through her intercession. Fittingly, therefore, after having saluted Mary and invoked her intercession, do we glorify the Father who has chosen her for a spouse, and the Son who has willed to be born of her in his humanity, and the Holy Ghost whose temple she was.

3. *The mysteries.* The manner of reciting the beads chiefly recommended by the Church is the ancient and popular method which consists in meditating upon the mysteries of the rosary while reciting the prayers. It lends

itself readily to this method by its very institution and form. In founding this devotion and proposing it to the faithful, St. Dominic indicated the mysteries as the object to which they should apply their mind while saying the beads. Its divisions likewise correspond to those of the mysteries. Herein we find an additional reason why the rosary deserves our love and respect.

The mysteries on which we meditate, which we honor, and in the grace of which we seek to participate, are the sublimest of our holy religion. They constitute a series of touching scenes in the life of the incarnate Word from the time of his advent on earth until his return to his heavenly Father, a series of wonderful acts performed for our salvation, acts in which the Blessed Virgin was closely associated.

With what appealing emphasis they manifest the great love of Jesus and Mary for us! For us and for our salvation they were accomplished: *Propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem*. He who meditates upon them will find therein a motive of gratitude towards Jesus and his holy Mother for the gift of our redemption, a powerful exhortation to return love for love, a sure foundation for the boundless confidence that we should have in their assistance.

The life of Jesus, in which Mary shares, commences with the joyous mysteries; then follow the sorrowful scenes of his passion; lastly his triumph and the other glorious mysteries.

The Christian life bears a resemblance to this. At the outset, under the overflowing pressure of grace, we felt the joy of giving ourselves to God and consecrating our lives generously to his service. Divine consolation superabounded and we seemed to make giant strides in the way of perfection. But soon come the sorrowful mysteries. To the first fervent aspirations succeeded temptations, dislike, arduous labor, trials of various kinds: these correspond to the agony, the trial, the cross. But at last, if we remain faithful, will come glorious triumph to dry our tears, console our sorrow, and bring rest to our soul.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, for a long time the recitation of the rosary has been a habit of my daily life. The day would be incomplete without it. I am fond of this prayer; and it is a joy for me in this way to testify to the Blessed Virgin Mary that I belong to her.

And yet have I not reason to reproach my-

self for the manner in which I recite it? How often have not haste, routine, lack of devotion deprived me of the fruits which I should obtain from it? Have I always chosen a suitable time for this prayer? Have I followed a method likely to fix my attention and arouse my piety? Have I, for this purpose, meditated upon the mysteries, which are a powerful help to the pious recitation of the beads?

Blessed Mother of my Savior, I humbly reproach myself with many negligences in this exercise. Obtain for me from thy divine Son the grace of greater piety in this devotion. It is a crown which each day I place at thy feet to testify my love and to renew my profession of becoming one of thy faithful children. I wish this crown to be rich and brilliant, all its blossoms beautiful, worthy of being presented to thee. May the devout recitation of the rosary every day procure for me thy unfailing protection in the midst of dangers and temptations, especially at the hour of my death.

I resolve:

1. To remain faithful to the daily recitation of the beads;
2. To perform this pious exercise with greater attention and devotion.

Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, pray for us.

XI

NIGHT PRAYERS

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the dispositions with which our Lord closed each of his days. In particular we will honor the dispositions of his sacred heart at the moment when, on the cross, he was about to close his eyes in the sleep of death.

II. We will see that our night prayers should embrace three things.

1. *Prayer.* Is it not becoming that we consecrate the last moments of the day by prayer? Each day is a blessing from God embracing a great number of other blessings. We need also to ask his protection for the coming night.

2. *The subject of meditation.* At the close of night prayers is the fittest time to select the subject for the next morning's meditation. It is important that we fix somewhat precisely the points into which our mental prayer will be divided.

3. *Preparation for death.* The end of each day reminds us that in the same way will our life come to its close. We should, therefore, recall the certainty of death, submissively accept the decree of our own death, and conclude with an act of contrition.

III. We will regret whatever lack of care or fervor we may discover in the way we perform this last exercise of the day. We will beg of God the grace to help us remain faithful to these three acts with which we should conclude each day.

Salva nos, Domine, vigilantes; custodi nos dormientes, ut vigilemus cum Christo et requiescamus in pace.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the dispositions with which our Lord closed each of his days on earth. We like to follow this divine Master as he performs the different works that marked his passage among men, to contemplate his miracles, to hear his adorable words. Let us picture him, after a day of fatiguing labor, preparing for the repose of which, by his own will, he feels the need. Prostrate before his heavenly Father, he returns thanks for all the blessings he has received from the divine bounty of Providence, he intercedes for sinners, he renews the offering of himself which he made on entering this world; then closing his eyes, he continues, in his mysterious sleep, the religious acts which his soul ceaselessly produces, as Holy Writ says: *I sleep, and my heart watcheth.*¹

¹ CANT. 5²

In particular let us honor with profound reverence the dispositions of our Savior's sacred heart at the moment when, to consummate his great sacrifice on the cross, he was about to close his eyes in the sleep of death. He had fulfilled the mission with which his heavenly Father charged him and which he freely accepted; he had drained the chalice of humiliations; he underwent the baptism of blood, the foreknowledge of which made of his whole life a continual sacrifice. Nothing remained but to confide his soul into the hands of his eternal Father, to undergo death as the crown of his sufferings. He did so with complete resignation to the divine will, accepting death as he had accepted all the rest, repeating the words which he had pronounced by the mouth of the psalmist centuries before. *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*¹ The office of Compline, a pious expression of the acts which a Christian ought to make before going to sleep at night like unto Christ in his sleep of death, contains these same words.

Let us thank our Lord because he has deigned to be our model in all things and let us ask that he give us the grace to profit by his example.

¹ PS. 30⁶; ST. LUKE 23⁴⁶

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Our night prayers, broadly so called, should embrace three things: the prayers, the choice of a subject for the meditation on the following morning, and the preparation for death.

1. *Prayer.* Our day was begun with prayer and it is proper that it should end in like manner. Fidelity to this duty has so entrenched itself in the habits of the Christian life that it is one of the last religious practices to be abandoned.

In the first place, is it not becoming that we consecrate the last moments of the day by offering to God the religious worship that is his due from a rational creature; to adore his majesty, acknowledge his supreme dominion, renew our belief in his word, place in him our reliance for time and for eternity, love him as the supreme good above all else? Perhaps amid the preoccupations of study or business which have absorbed us, we have thought of him but little in the course of the day. Should not our heart seek to repair this neglect when, in the evening, we find calm and tranquility for so holy a purpose?

Each day that comes to a close is a blessing from God, embracing a great number of other

blessings. In the natural order, the clothes that cover us, the bread that nourishes us, the fire that keeps us warm, the sunshine that gives us light, the air that we breathe, all these necessities of life are so many gifts of God's bounty. In the order of grace we have been the recipients of still more precious treasures: the sacraments which, perhaps, we have received, the holy sacrifice at which we have assisted, the temptations and trials from which we have been preserved, the spiritual helps of various kinds that have been bestowed upon us. Can we end a day in which we have received so much from the hand of God without returning thanks to that paternal Providence that watches over us with so attentive and tender a solicitude?

If we have need of God's protection during the day, it is likewise necessary that it be continued until the morrow. This night may bring many dangers for both body and soul. Hence our need of turning to God and by fervent prayer asking his help and protection.

Behold the many urgent needs that call for the assistance of our prayers! The sad trials of the Church, the conversion of sinners, the perseverance of the just, the deliverance of souls from purgatory, the light of faith for

those outside the fold, the particular needs of persons who are dear to us and of those who have asked us to pray for them.

And we will not forget to address our prayers also to the Blessed Virgin, to our guardian angel, and to our patron saints.

2. *The subject of meditation.* At the close of our night prayers is the fittest time to select the subject for meditation on the following morning, for which purpose we should have recourse to some book of piety or be aided by our own reflection. Experience shows us the wisdom of this precaution. Thus prepared, we will come to the morning exercise of mental prayer with our mind full of the subject. Already acquainted with the considerations, we can engrave them more deeply on our soul by reflection, we can assimilate them more completely.

But for this preparation it does not suffice that we choose the subject in a general way; it is important that we fix somewhat precisely the points into which our meditation will be divided. When the actual time of mental prayer arrives, we will more easily and securely concentrate our attention on the subject because it will assume definiteness and will furnish successive and connected considerations to which we may apply our mind.

It then behooves us, during the interval between night prayers and the morning meditation, to remain as recollected as possible. Wherefore we are advised to observe a more complete silence than at other hours of the day and also to refrain, so far as we can from profane occupations. Of such importance is meditation in the spiritual life that we should neglect nothing that may contribute to its success.

3. *Preparation for death.* This forms an important part of our monthly retreat, but should be renewed in a brief form every night before we go to sleep. As each day is brought to a close, we should be reminded that in the same way will our life come to its end. The darkness of night quite naturally carries our thoughts to the dark night of the tomb which will sometime enshroud us. That sleep which will soon overcome us is a striking image of the state to which we will be reduced by death. And has it not happened at times that this semblance has been transformed into reality, that many, who went to sleep in seeming good health, have, without regaining consciousness, passed from the sleep of repose to that of death?

Our preparation every night for death ought

to embrace three things. In the first place, by a short reflection, we should recall the certainty of death, its possible proximity, the consequences that would ensue for us in relation both to this life and to the next.

Then, by an act of submission, should we accept the decree of divine justice which condemns us to death, generously offer to God the sacrifice of our life. Is not this a holy offering to our Creator? Hence to renew it often is advantageous and meritorious for our soul; for we know not whether, when death comes, we shall be able to make this act.

Lastly, we should conclude with an act of contrition as complete and perfect as we can make. With the help of God's grace, we will have thus purified our conscience from its every stain and established our soul in the state in which we would wish to be found at the moment of death.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, I understand the importance of ending each day holily, but to be faithful to the acts of piety which I should repeat each night, I need the assistance of thy grace.

Must I not confess that I have made but

feeble attempts to sanctify the close of each day? How have I occupied my mind at night prayers? Have I not failed to prepare my meditation in the evening and consequently come to this exercise without knowing what will be its subject? Have I respected the silence and recollection that should begin at night prayers? Have I regularly prepared myself for death before going to bed, testifying to myself that, should God call me to himself during the night, I would be ready to appear before the throne of his divine justice?

Dear Lord, pardon my past negligences. I resolve, with the help of thy grace, to be faithful, at the close of each day, to these acts upon which I have just meditated.

*Salva nos Domine, vigilantes; custodi nos dormientes, ut vigilemus cum Christo et requiescamus in pace.*¹

¹ COMPLINE

XII

CONFESSION

SUMMARY

I. We will adore Christ, the model of penitent souls, and call to mind the beautiful words of the prophet Isaias concerning the man of sorrows. We will adore our Lord as we see him under the double aspect of penitent in the sinner who confesses and of judge in the priest who absolves.

II. We will consider our three duties in regard to the sacrament of penance.

1. *We should approach it with love*; for it remits our sins, confers sanctifying grace upon us or increases it in our soul, and strengthens our will against sin. It also requires certain personal acts that are most salutary.

2. *We should receive the sacrament worthily*. This implies a serious examination of conscience, the confession of all grievous sins, in addition to which it is profitable to confess our venial sins, and sincere contrition.

3. *We should safeguard the fruits of the sacrament*.

How desirable it is that each confession should be marked by some progress in the acquisition of Christian virtues. To help accomplish this, we ought, by recollection, to preserve the impressions of grace, guard ourselves against the causes which

have formerly led us into sin, and concentrate our efforts on some special fault.

III. We will thank our Savior for having instituted in the sacrament of penance so easy a means of recovering his grace and for the sweet tranquility and consolation that is to be found therein. We will ask the grace to love this sacrament more and more.

We will resolve:

1. To exercise great care in preparing for confession;

2. To take the necessary means for perseverance after confession.

A contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore in Christ the model of penitent souls. One of the principal ends of his advent on earth was to destroy the empire of sin. For this purpose, although he was innocence itself, he devoted himself to the expiation of sin as if he had been guilty. In assuming our nature, he willed at the same time to submit to all the infirmities and all the griefs, sin excepted, which are the lot of humanity. *Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows, says Holy Writ. He was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins: the*

*chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, every one hath turned aside into his own way: and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*¹ These words of the prophet were literally fulfilled in our divine Savior. Having accepted the office and quality of victim for sin, he underwent the sad condition: the agony, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the death on the cross.

But not content with expiating sin by his humiliations and griefs, he wished also to establish penitence in the Church. He would have all us participate in his detestation of sin, remove from our hearts all attachments thereto, and be ready to expiate it with all our power, offering ourselves to God as victims prepared to endure all the strictness of his justice. Such, in truth, are the dispositions that he produces in fervent souls.

And yet, our acts of expiation will be sterile unless made efficacious by the merits of Christ the perfect penitent. These merits, the precious fruit of the Passion, belong to us and, as they are inexhaustible, can be applied without restriction or limit.

¹ Is. 53⁴⁻⁶

In the first place, they are applied to us in baptism, which makes us Christians; then, as often as need be, in the sacrament of penance. instituted by Christ to enable us to recover the grace lost by our actual offenses.

In this sacrament, in the one hand, our Lord arouses in the sinner the spirit of repentance, inspiring him with sorrow for his sins and with the desire to expiate them; on the other hand, exercising in the priest the function of merciful judge, he pardons the sinner and bestows on him grace and love.

Let us pay our tribute of grateful homage to our Lord as we see him under the double aspect of victim of expiation in the sinner who confesses and of judge in the priest who absolves. At the remembrance of all the absolutions we have received in the course of our life, of the contrition which God has produced in our hearts, and of the pardon that he has so often granted us after our falls, let us repeat and increase our gratitude to this good master.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

We have three duties in regard to the sacrament of penance: lovingly to approach it, to receive it worthily, and to preserve its effects.

1. *We should be anxious to avail ourselves of the sacrament of penance.* There are many Christians who find confession a heavy yoke and who chafe under the divine command which imposes it as an obligation. But others there are who, understanding in the light of faith the immense blessing which Christ bestowed by instituting this sacrament and impressed with the great advantages to be derived therefrom for their sanctification, approach the sacred tribunal with joy in their hearts.

After the adorable sacrament of the Eucharist, there is nothing in the Church that ought to be regarded as more precious than the sacrament of penance whether considered in itself or in the acts that are required by way of condition. We know that it remits sin, that it increases sanctifying grace, and that it strengthens the will.

It remits sin. Whatever the state of my conscience, even though I have offended God most grievously, if with repentant heart I kneel at the feet of his priest and confess my faults, the words of absolution will purify my soul; God will ratify in heaven the sentence of his representative and I will leave the sacred tribunal with the consoling assurance that I have recovered his friendship.

It confers or increases sanctifying grace. We lose that divine gift by sin, which deprives our soul of its supernatural beauty and destroys our right to heaven. But all that is restored by absolution. At the word of the priest, a wonderful transformation takes place within us; we become again the sanctuary of God's Holy Spirit, filled with his presence and enriched with his gifts.

It strengthens the will. The soul thus purified and restored to God's favor acquires at the same time a new vigor; for it receives help from God to aid it in fulfilling its obligations, in overcoming the assaults of the tempter, in resisting the tendencies of concupiscence, and in flying from sin.

Besides these fundamental and essential effects of the sacrament, there are some valuable accessories: the examination of conscience that must precede confession, obliging us to enter into ourselves to find out our faults and forewarning us against the frequent illusions that constitute a grave danger to our eternal salvation; the considerations by which we arouse our contrition, serving to recall important Christian truths and to impress them on our mind; the act of contrition itself, so obviously salutary, which detaches the soul

from sin and renews in it the love of God; the confession of our sins, at once an act of humility and an exercise of expiation; the personal advice and encouragement that we receive from our confessor, his fatherly reproof, all a powerful support for our will as well as a source of light.

These considerations should incline us to approach the sacred tribunal of penance not only without dislike but even with joy.

2. *We should receive the sacrament of penance worthily.* That we may obtain the happy fruits of the sacrament, certain conditions are required to which the sacramental grace is attached. Should we not fulfill them, not only will the sacrament produce no effect, but, in case the negligence is of our own fault, we will be guilty of sacrilege, changing into poison the remedy designed for our cure.

The first condition is the *examination of conscience*. Before presenting ourselves at the sacred tribunal, we must, by serious, exact, attentive, and severe reflection, explore the depths of our soul, take account of our daily duties to know the number and gravity of our sins. Always avoiding scrupulosity, we will take pains not to be satisfied with a light, rapid, superficial examination, but will bear

in mind that the human conscience is an abyss, that self-love often blinds us to our faults, and hence that we easily fall into self-deception in the matter of our sins.

The second condition is *confession*, a sincere avowal of our faults. To voluntarily conceal a grave sin is itself a mortal offense and makes our confession sacrilegious. To be sure, the accusation of venial sins is not strictly required; but at times dissimulation, springing from bashful timidity, indicates a lack of candor for which a delicate conscience will not fail to reproach itself.

The third condition is *contrition*. Involuntary forgetfulness excuses the absence of integrity and does not prevent the sacrament from producing its effect. Not so with contrition. For the penitent to obtain the remission of his sins, it is absolutely necessary that he form in his heart and express a sincere sorrow for them; for the past, a hearty detestation of them; for the present, a disposition to expiate them by penance; for the future, a firm resolve not to offend God again. But contrition is not born spontaneously within us; it is the fruit of the double co-operation of our efforts and the grace of Christ. Therefore must we ask it of God and enter upon the

consideration of motives likely to produce it within our soul. Let us realize that the danger of confession without contrition is not confined to the faithful who approach the sacrament of penance at rare intervals. We who frequent the sacred tribunal more habitually are especially exposed to the peril of making our confession without sufficient preparation.

3. *We should safeguard the fruits of the sacrament.* What would it profit us to be converted to God, to detest our faults, to confess them to a priest and receive absolution if, almost as soon as we leave the sacred tribunal, we fall again into the same sins and imperfections?

No doubt, however perfect our confessions, they will never make us avoid every sin or defect. Yet how desirable it is that each confession should be marked by some progress in the acquisition of Christian virtues, that each successive one should find us less imperfect than the one preceding!

If we remain continually the same after so many confessions, have we not just cause to fear that we are guilty of an abuse of grace? We must, then, profit by our confessions to detach ourselves more and more completely

from sin and to ground ourselves ever more firmly in virtue.

How may this be done? By practice of recollection we can preserve in our soul the impressions of grace which confession has produced, we can recall from time to time the motives that have been most effective in moving us to contrition, and we can often renew, at the feet of our divine Master, the sorrow for our faults and our firm purpose of amendment.

We can also guard ourselves against the causes which have formerly led us into sin, inclinations of our nature which we have discovered, subtle temptations to which we easily yield, occasions in the presence of which we are weak and fall.

Lastly, we can with great profit, after each confession, concentrate our efforts upon some special fault whose predominance we have recognized and for which God has inspired in us a genuine regret. Thus the application of our will, less divided, may be more energetic and efficacious.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Blessed be thou, divine Savior, for having given me in the sacrament of penance so easy

a means of returning to thee and recovering thy grace when I have had the misfortune of offending thee. Were I deprived of this, how great would be my anxiety? Certain of having deserved thy wrath, would I be equally certain of having obtained pardon and would I not reasonably fear that my contrition had not attained the necessary degree of perfection? In place of these anxious preoccupations that would disturb the peace of my soul, what sweet tranquility and consolation I experience whenever, after losing thy grace, I have recourse to this sacrament of reconciliation!

Keep alive in my heart, dear Lord, a love for the sacrament of penance. Grant that I may never abuse this merciful means of sanctification. Helped by thy grace, I wish to prepare myself always with faithful care, to renew my confidence, recalling all the blessings which thou dost bestow therein if my dispositions are holy, and entertaining a salutary fear of the dangers to which I am exposed if my dispositions are not so.

Safeguard in my soul the fruit of my confessions and keep me from those unfortunate relapses which I have to regret so often in the past.

I resolve:

1. To exercise great care in preparing for confession;

2. To take the necessary means for perseverance after confession.

A contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.¹

¹ Ps. 50¹⁹

XIII

HOLY COMMUNION

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore Christ possessing the fulness of life and receiving the power to communicate it to us. The means par excellence by which he accomplishes this is holy communion. We will join with the Church in exalting this divine Savior who gives himself to us in so marvelous a manner.
- II. We will consider our duty in regard to holy communion under three heads.

1. *The desire to receive holy communion*, which is justly regarded as a mark of fervor. Whoever loves Christ should desire what he desires; and we are sure he wishes us to approach the sacrament of the altar frequently. Moreover, communion is a means of rendering our union with Christ more intimate, as well as of reproducing his image in our soul.

2. *The dispositions with which we should approach holy communion*. First in importance is purity of conscience, which includes freedom from mortal sin and, for all devoted followers of Christ, freedom also from all culpable sinful attachments. A good communion should be accompanied by living faith, ardent love, entire confidence, and profound humility. And our thanksgiving should be characterized by earnest gratitude and joy.

3. *The good effects of holy communion*, which we must preserve by coöperating with the graces of the sacrament. The principal purpose of Christ's visit is to make us live his life. We should, therefore, at each of our communions, propose to ourselves some practical, proximate end to be attained; and we should safeguard the recollection and the impressions of our communions.

III. We will think of the privilege that we enjoy in the frequent reception of holy communion. But we will ask ourselves whether we have justly esteemed this grace. We will humbly beg forgiveness for whatever laxity we discover in our preparation or thanksgiving.

We will resolve:

1. Never to communicate with a doubtful conscience;

2. To increase the fervor of our communion and our thanksgiving;

3. To preserve the remembrance of our communions.

He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore Christ, the divine source of spiritual life by which we become Christians, children of God. *I am come*, he says, *that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.*¹ He possessed in himself the fulness

¹ ST. JOHN 10¹⁰

of life. *In him was life.*¹ But he did not wish to enjoy it alone. He received the power to communicate it to us and thus to elevate us to the participation of the divine nature and to the title of children of God, as we read in the Gospel of St. John: *But as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the sons of God.*² Is not this the final purpose of the Incarnation? Such also is the marvel brought to pass every day in the Church and will be to the end of time.

Now, the means par excellence by which Jesus communicates his life to us is holy communion. In the natural order we sustain life by eating. According to a mysterious law of his eternal wisdom, God has willed that all living things on earth should have recourse to nourishment which, by uniting itself to their substance, should renew and repair the losses and waste. It was in harmony with the divine plan that the same law should hold in the supernatural order of grace. To sustain the spiritual life, to renew and augment it within us, we need food for the soul. It is Christ himself, hidden yet really present in

¹ ST. JOHN 1⁴

² ST. JOHN 1¹²

the Eucharist, under the species of bread and wine, who is this nourishment.

Thus he who is in heaven the food of saints and angels has become on earth the spiritual nourishment of the children of men.

*Ecce panis angelorum
Factus cibus viatorum.*¹

At the remembrance of such a blessing, let us join with the Church in exclamations of praise, thanksgiving, and love. By hymns and canticles let us exalt this divine Savior who gives himself to us in so marvelous a manner, who is so truly our Good Shepherd, nourishing us, not with a foreign substance, but with his own body.

*Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem,
Lauda ducem et pastorem,
In hymnis et canticis.*²

II. CONSIDERATIONS

We may consider our duty in regard to holy communion under three heads: the love and desire we should have for it, the dispositions

¹ MASS OF CORPUS CHRISTI

² *Ibid.*

with which we should receive it, the coöperation with God's grace bestowed therein.

1. *The desire to receive holy communion* is justly regarded as a characteristic and consoling mark of fervor. The saints of God experienced a powerful attraction to communicate frequently. And it ought not surprise us to find the same dispositions in every fervent soul. What is fervor, indeed, if not the love of Christ, the incarnate Word? Not a languishing, inactive love such as one meets with in a great number of Christian souls; but ardent, living, strong, and generous. Love for our Savior can not well possess these characteristics without arousing the desire for frequent communion.

In the first place, whoever loves Christ should love what he loves, should will what he wills, should desire what he desires. Are we not sure that our divine Master desires most ardently to see his followers frequently approach the sacrament of the altar? It is in order to give himself to us that he instituted the Eucharist and that he remains in our tabernacles. What would be our love for him if we should not, on our part, long to receive him?

Moreover, whoever loves Christ strives con-

tinually and with all his power to render his union with our Lord more and more perfect, wishing to live by him, in him, with him to feel his presence within, or rather to be received into him. To this end should our spiritual exercises be directed; this should be the object of our prayers. This petition should be ever in our heart: *Come, Lord Jesus.*¹ Except the glorious vision of the blessed in heaven, there is no union between Christ and a Christian soul more intimate than that effected by holy communion. Jesus dwells in the soul by communion, and that soul dwells in him by a sort of mysterious compenetration: *In me manet et ego in eo;*² like two lives united to make but one, so that he who has communicated can say in St. Paul's words: *And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.*³

In fine, a soul that loves Christ wishes to reproduce his image in itself by the faithful practice of his virtues, by a more abundant participation in his holiness. Such is the fruit of holy communion. It purifies our soul from the stains and the remains of sin; it develops,

¹ APOC. 22²⁰

² ST. JOHN 6⁵⁷

³ GAL. 2²⁰

expands, strengthens the infused virtues; it inspires us to long for the perfect life and gives our will a powerful force to labor in the attainment of that purpose.

If, then, love for Christ is truly alive within us, we will desire to approach the holy table often; the great and consoling happiness of our life will be to receive this heavenly nourishment frequently.

2. *The dispositions with which we approach holy communion* should be the most perfect possible in view of the august act which we perform. First in importance is purity of conscience. We may distinguish two degrees.

There is an essential purity which is rigorously of precept and without which the sacrament would be absolutely ineffective for us. It consists in freedom from mortal sin. This suffices to save us from a sacrilegious communion. *For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily*, says the Apostle, *eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.*¹

We will not be satisfied with this but will keep our heart free from all culpable sinful attachments, knowing that the purer our heart,

¹ I COR. 11²⁹

the more perfect will be our union with Christ and the more abundant the grace of the sacrament. Jesus is purity itself in the loftiest sense of the word; and it is to pure souls that he gives his friendship and his choicest favors. Therefore, according to the mind of the Apostle, let a man interrogate his conscience, let him purify it from the smallest stain either by confession or at least by an act of contrition, and, thus prepared, let him partake of this divine nourishment.

A communion, to be good, should be accompanied by a great fervor of devotion. Living faith, ardent love, entire confidence, immense gratitude, such are the dispositions which should fill our soul at communion. Recollected, silent, free from every other preoccupation, we can give complete attention to the divine guest who is coming to us. There is one disposition in particular which the Church invites us to produce in the depths of our heart before receiving Jesus Christ, namely, the profound conviction of our own unworthiness—*Domine, non sum dignus*—at the thought of our many shortcomings on the one hand, and on the other the infinite greatness and holiness of him who comes to us.

But let us not abstain from holy communion

because of our lack of spiritual progress. This would be to abandon our spiritual food for the very reason that we stand in so great need of it. Nor let us confuse the genuine spirit of devotion with a sensible fervor sometimes vouchsafed to encourage our faintheartedness or to reward our fidelity. If our will is in tune with God's holy law, we may receive our Lord in holy communion without fear or hesitation.

The sacred host is placed on our tongue and we become the tabernacle of God. Then follows our thanksgiving. Who, at that precious moment, does not feel the need of conversing with Christ, of adoring him on the throne he has deigned to erect in our heart? What joy and praise and love arise in our soul at the presence of our Lord, what earnest gratitude to our good Master! How generously we give ourselves to him, how humbly and confidently implore his grace! The moments immediately after communion are without question the most consoling of our lives. With what piety and recollection, therefore, should we ask his blessing!

3. *We should preserve the good effects of holy communion by co-operating with the graces of the sacrament.* We must remember that the

principal end of Christ's visit in holy communion is not to receive some transient acts of worship from us nor to make us feel the sweetness of his presence for a few minutes, but to make us live his life, to make us holy. He unites himself to us not to remain inactive but that he may accomplish in our souls those divine operations which constantly arise from his own, to produce in us those acts of religion, humility, mortification, obedience, charity, and zeal by means of which he seeks to imprint his divine image in all his members.

If in general we are obliged to profit by every grace accorded us, especially is it true of the grace of holy communion, the most excellent of all. Here in particular the divine law of progress is imposed on us. The more frequent our communions, the greater and more rapid should be our spiritual growth, the more should the supernatural reign of grace be strengthened in our soul, the closer should be the resemblance of our life to that of the incarnate Word, who is the perfection of holiness.

For this, two conditions are necessary. First, that at each of our communions we propose to ourselves some practical end to be attained, with God's help, as the fruit of that communion. It may be a victory over some re-

curing fault or the acquisition of a virtue or the more faithful practice of some pious exercise. So often we determine upon nothing precise as the fruit of our communion. Having taken no resolution, we accomplish nothing.

The second condition is that we safeguard the recollection and the impressions of our communions. If we have learned to appreciate the happy privilege conferred upon us by the visit of Christ, we will not be content with thinking of him during the few moments of our thanksgiving, or rather, even after leaving the church or chapel, we will continue the thanksgiving, thus giving to our life a new character of recollection and fervor. The thought of our Savior's presence within will strengthen us against the dissipations and distractions of our exterior life. And in this way the grace of communion will not be sterile but will bear many fruits.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Every day, perhaps, I have the blessed privilege of approaching thy holy table, my Savior, and of receiving thee into my heart. In this way dost thou prepare me for that daily com-

munion which soon, when I am a priest, it will be granted me to receive. But do I greatly esteem this grace? Do I prepare for it worthily? Do I profit from it as I should?

I ought to ask myself seriously whether I have a true love for holy communion, whether I appreciate its holiness, whether I am practically convinced of the truth expressed by St. Theresa in these words: *If we should approach the Blessed Sacrament with a great faith and a burning love, a simple communion would suffice to make us rich.*

Do I receive holy communion with the right intention, free from all self-love and human respect?

With what purity of heart have I gone to communion? With how much faith and love and humility have I received my Lord and made my thanksgiving?

Finally, what results can I show after so many communions? Am I more pious, more regular, more industrious, more obedient, more mortified, more humble, more charitable?

My God, what reason I have to fear that I have been guilty of abusing the great blessing of holy communion by negligence! And thou wilt require an account of all thy graces.

I resolve:

1. Never to approach holy communion with a doubtful conscience;

2. To increase the fervor of my communion and thanksgiving;

3. To retain the remembrance of my communions.

*He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him.*¹

¹ ST. JOHN 6⁵⁷

XIV

MONTHLY RETREAT

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our divine Master inviting his disciples to *come apart into a secret place and rest a little*. And we will admire the economy in which he would have us safeguard our spirituality by means of retreats.
- II. We will consider that the monthly retreat helps us to remember our duties, our sins, and our resolutions.
1. *Our duties*: by recalling that the ultimate Christian purpose of our life is our own salvation, and more specifically, here in the seminary, to fit ourselves for the sacred ministry. We need occasional periods of recollection to keep these purposes and the consequent duties before our mind.
2. *Our sins*. For our spiritual progress, the daily and weekly examinations of conscience will not suffice. They should be supplemented by a more thoroughgoing one every month.
3. *Our resolutions*, which are ineffective unless renewed from time to time. The monthly retreat is a fitting time to recall them.
- III. We will ask ourselves whether we have made use of the monthly retreat to keep fresh in our

heart the purpose of our seminary life, the correction of our faults, and our progress in virtue.

We will resolve, with God's help, to set aside one day every month for a spiritual retreat.

Renovamini spiritu mentis vestræ.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our divine Master inviting his disciples to seek a little repose in solitude in order to find a respite from the labors to which they devote themselves. *Come apart into a desert place*, he says to them, *and rest a little*.¹ So, by a wise and fatherly dispensation, lest perhaps their powers be weakened by too continual activity, he tells them to take some relaxation, which will prepare them for renewed labor.

For us he plans a similar economy. He would have us procure by recreation the relaxation needed by our body and spirit. And for fear our heart will grow hardened and our piety weaken in the routine of our daily occupations, he calls us from time to time to the repose of a spiritual retreat. Every year an entire week is consecrated to it. And at the approach of ordinations it is also in retreat

¹ ST. MARK 6³¹

that we prepare to receive the gift of God. Likewise, every month we are invited to consecrate one day to recollection so as to renew the spiritual life within us.

For a considerable time this practice has been common in religious communities, thus procuring for the members an effective means of maintaining their fervor and preventing the laxity to which they are exposed by the very regularity of their lives. But today it is not only in communities that the monthly retreat is esteemed. Many good priests, desirous of sanctifying their lives and wishing to guard against dissipation and lukewarmness, abandon their ordinary occupations once a month and seek in solitude a little calm and silence to commune more intimately with our Lord and to strengthen themselves in his holy love.

Let us glorify the Spirit of Christ thus manifested. Let us ask him to impress upon us the importance of the monthly retreat and to help us be faithful to so salutary a practice.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The monthly retreat consists in setting aside an entire day of each month in which we consecrate to God, by meditation and serious

reflection, more time than on other days. Let us consider some advantages to be gained from this pious practice. There are three things that we are inclined to forget, the remembrance of which is, however, an indispensable condition of our spiritual progress: they are our duties, our sins, and our resolutions. But the monthly retreat helps us to remember them.

1. *Our duties.* Why have I been placed in the world? What ultimate purpose should I keep before my eyes and what means ought I adopt to attain this end? The Christian purpose of my life is my own salvation and this can be accomplished only by obeying God's holy laws: that I honor and love him above all things; that I be united to my brethren by charity, casting from my heart all bitterness, all envy, all hate; that I be humble, chaste, mortified; that I patiently carry my cross in the foot-steps of Jesus Christ.

But more specifically, as a seminarian, I am bound to respond generously to God's call, to observe the rule of life laid down for my training, to neglect none of the means of sanctification which are so plentiful in this holy house, to cultivate the priestly virtues in my heart, and to apply myself diligently to the double duty of study and prayer in order to fit myself

for the sacred ministry that I will one day assume. It will not suffice that I know these duties and recognize them speculatively in a general way; I must carry them out in the many particulars of my daily life.

However, in the midst of the distracting preoccupations that persistently claim my immediate attention, I easily lose sight of the ulterior purpose which they are intended to subserve, I quickly forget the noble end which should be their inspiring motive. As we know from experience, these are forcibly recalled by our retreats, made once or twice a year. But forgetfulness and lack of reflection produce their unfortunate effects in less time than that. Hence the utility of a monthly retreat, at which we will take our bearings, so to speak, in relation to our duties.

2. *Our sins.* We reflect but little upon our duties, even less upon our sins, to repent of them and avoid their recurrence. Our conscience has depths seldom reached by our examination. When we prepare for our ordinary weekly confession, we glance over the surface of our soul and, if there is no ugly wreckage in sight, we are at a loss for matter of confession. This is explained not by our utter freedom from faults but by the superficiality of

our examination. The great saints of God discovered in themselves numerous defects. And we are not more holy than they but more thoughtless. Each day we are guilty of many imperfections and omissions in our prayers, in our relations with others, in fulfilling the particular duties of our state of life, in the practice of virtue: negligence and idleness, distractions more or less voluntary, lack of co-operation with God's grace, faulty intentions. Still less do we take account of those habits, attachments, unmortified inclinations of our nature. How important it is that we acquire this more thorough knowledge of ourselves which is the first condition of our spiritual progress.

For this purpose, our daily examination of conscience will not suffice; it is too rapid, too cursory, too confined. Hence our need of taking a more complete account of our conscience every year. This annual review, however, may be profitably supplemented by a monthly retreat which will be at once its partial preparation and its salutary renewal.

3. *Our resolutions.* If to become perfect it were enough to take good resolutions, we would all have been saints long ago. How often since the solemn promises of our first

communion have we again promised God to love him, to serve him, to obey his law? Not only with our lips have we uttered our vow, but from the sincerest depths of our heart. And we know how poorly we have lived up to our resolutions. For some days, perhaps a few weeks, we were faithful to them, and then forgot or at least neglected what we had promised. Little by little the evil tendencies of our nature asserted themselves, carelessness crept in, resistance to temptation became less vigorous, our watchfulness less assiduous. And alas, we find that we have relapsed into our former unmortified, lukewarm state. In the fervor of a good yearly retreat, to sincerely resolve upon amendment is, therefore, not enough. Because of our carelessness and our tendency to grow negligent, it is necessary from time to time to renew the offering of ourselves to God. Without such renewal we are running a serious risk of passing from tepidity even into grievous sin.

The monthly retreat is an abridgment of the annual one. We should then recall the impressions of the latter, especially the resolutions we were inspired to make. The thought of the last moments of our life and the account that we must render of our stewardship is well

calculated to detach our hearts from the vanities of earth and to encourage us in the work of saving our immortal souls.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Have I made use of the monthly retreat to keep fresh in my heart the lofty spiritual purpose of my seminary life? Have I not omitted it through neglect or in consequence of an habitual indifference towards exercises of piety? Is not, perhaps, this neglect partly responsible for my lack of fervor? May it not help to explain why from one annual retreat to the next I have made so little spiritual progress, why I have failed to correct my faults or to acquire those virtues of which I stand in need?

Enlightened and strengthened by thy grace, dear Lord, I will set aside one day every month for this important exercise, that the growing fervor of my seminary life may be a pledge of a devoted service in the holy priesthood.

*Renovamini spiritu mentis vestræ.*¹

¹ EPHES. 4²³

XV

ANNUAL RETREAT

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our divine Savior showing us by example and counsel the necessity of retreats. Thirty years of his mortal life he spent in retirement. Before quitting the earth, he directed his apostles to prepare by retreat for the coming of the Holy Ghost. And in retreats he continues to operate.

II. As the soul may be found in one of three states, sin, lukewarmness, or fervor, we will consider the usefulness of a good retreat for each of these spiritual conditions.

1. *The state of mortal sin.* Because of the difficulty of parting from sin and because of the wound that it leaves in the soul, a retreat is eminently useful. The action of God's grace is stronger than usual and our act of contrition more deep-seated and enduring.

2. *The state of lukewarmness.* If the retreat finds us in this unfortunate state, it will help us to recognize it, to appreciate its gravity, and to courageously uproot it.

3. *The state of fervor.* The example of the saints exhorts us to preserve this great blessing and to mount to greater perfection by the help of retreats. This growth in holiness should characterize our life in the seminary.

III. We will acknowledge that our retreats have not had their full effects in us because of defects in our coöperation, because we have not fulfilled the indispensable conditions, which are chiefly external silence, interior recollection, the exercises, and practical resolutions. We will ask God's help to fully profit by this powerful means of sanctification.

We will resolve to observe conscientiously the conditions essential to a good retreat.

Intrate toti, manete soli, exite alii.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our divine Master showing us by example and counsel the necessity of retreats. Thirty years of his mortal life he passed in the retirement of that quiet little Galilean home, hidden from the world, concealing his treasures of wisdom and holiness. Even when about to begin his public ministry, he was led by the Spirit into the desert, there to prepare by fasting and prayer for his missionary labors. And before quitting the earth, he directed his apostles to prepare in like manner for the coming of the Holy Ghost. Following the Master's precept, they retired into the upper room in Jerusalem in company with the Blessed Mother and the holy women, and there entered upon a retreat.

It was therein that God's Holy Spirit worked the great miracle of Pentecost, by which the Church was established. In retreats he continues to operate, to enlighten and transform the souls of men, detaching them from the world and from themselves. Great conversions take place in retreat, powerful resolutions, heroic sacrifices.

This forms also the seminarian's immediate spiritual preparation for his successive ordinations. And by the same means does the priest, after a year of missionary labors, seek to purify his heart and rekindle his fervor.

We thank thee, dear Lord, for this means of sanctification. We ask the grace always to profit by it as we ought.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Each day I perform certain pious exercises by which I should raise my mind and heart to God, examine my conscience, and renew my determination to grow more perfect. By the sacrament of Penance my soul is cleansed from sin every week and at more frequent intervals is nourished by the bread of life. Once a month I ought to set aside an entire day for recollection. But if I wish to serve God fervently,

to be a devout seminarian and later a zealous priest, it is necessary that I devote one entire week every year exclusively to the work of my perfection. This supposes that I lay aside during that time all external occupations not absolutely necessary, place myself in God's presence and face to face with the question of my eternity.

As the soul may be found in one of three states, sin, lukewarmness, or fervor, we may consider the usefulness of a good retreat for each of these spiritual conditions.

1. *The state of sin.* If I have the dreadful misfortune of being in the state of mortal sin, no long reasoning is needed for me to understand that I ought to make a good retreat.

It is true that to rise from sin and enter again into God's favor and friendship, absolution received with the requisite dispositions will suffice. But it is more difficult than one thinks to recover the lost treasure of charity, to break with sin which has deprived us of grace. Who does not know that mortal sin leaves after it a wound that weakens the soul and makes it liable to a relapse?

For both these reasons is a retreat eminently useful. The separation from external distractions, the recollection within the soul and the

silence of the environment, prepare the way for the sober thoughts of repentance and conversion to God.

By meditating on the eternal truths of religion in the impressive conditions of a retreat, we realize more clearly the enormity of sin, the blessings we lose, and the awful consequences to which we are exposed thereby. The action of God's grace is stronger and more penetrating than usual and urges us to imitate the prodigal son by a repentant return to our heavenly Father.

Our act of contrition in these circumstances is not a mere passing disposition that presently evaporates, not a superficial renouncement which the slightest temptation will make us forget, but a deep-seated conviction of a more permanent character. It is ordinarily in retreats that men turn seriously to God, resolved to accomplish a fundamental transformation of their lives.

2. *The state of lukewarmness.* It more frequently happens that a retreat finds us in a state of tepidity in God's service. We had set out with a determination to attend diligently to the things of the soul, but we have grown weary of the struggle, we have become indifferent to our spiritual progress, we have lost our

fervor in the pursuit of priestly virtues which we are bound to cultivate during the preparatory life of our seminary training.

What then will a retreat do for us? It will help us to recognize the lukewarm state of our soul, to appreciate its gravity, and to courageously uproot it.

For a thoroughgoing examination of our soul we need the spiritual environment of silence and recollection which is to be found only in a retreat. Lukewarmness by its very nature has arisen from indifference and neglect; it is a state of drifting. Therefore to be fully cognizant of this condition of inactivity, there is required a certain intensity of introspection.

Only by comparing our present tepidity with the fervor from which we have drifted, can we realize what has been our loss. Thus will we see how, by imperceptible degrees, we have been led to the verge of grievous sin and perhaps beyond.

With the courageous strength and the impetus imparted to our soul by a good retreat, we will once more resume our heavenward journey, determined to be generous in the fulfillment of our duties, vigilant against a perilous relapse into lukewarmness, fervent in the noble work of fitting ourselves for God's holy priesthood.

3. *The state of fervor.* Are we in the state of devoted friendship towards God? Then by means of the retreat should we seek to ground it yet more firmly and to secure ourselves against the danger of losing so great a blessing.

The example of the saints eloquently exhorts us to do so. No matter what height of sanctity they had attained, they did not regard a retreat as superfluous but, on the contrary, devoted considerable time every year to this holy exercise. They knew well that on earth there is no degree of virtue secure against a possible fall no fervor that may not decline into lukewarmness. And they believed that no more efficacious protection from this danger could be found than a retreat; for, brought face to face with our inmost selves and our duties, on the one hand we perceive the first tendencies of negligence, on the other we renew our resolutions and are strengthened in the pursuit of virtue.

Not only must we guard ourselves against the loss of our fervor, but we must become more and more perfect, purify and increase our love for God and our neighbor. Perfection is sometimes represented under the figure of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven. Our

life should be a constant ascent, and no matter how lofty may be the holiness already attained, such a grace ought but encourage us to aspire still higher. Let us reflect upon these words of St. Paul, that zealous apostle whose life and words are a constant reproach to our self-complacency: *Forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus.*¹

The necessity of perpetual progress in spirituality follows from the very notion of seminary life. Why have we withdrawn, to a certain extent, from the secular world for the years of our immediate preparation, why are we thus segregated into a separate community living together in this holy place? Surely it is not only, we may say, not principally to pursue our theological studies, but also that we may form in ourselves the soul of a priest. At no time in our course can we say, "Now we have acquired the priestly character in all its perfection." The passing of each month, of each year, should be a milestone on the way of our spiritual progress. If we entered the seminary with fervent zeal, every year that

¹ PHILIP., 3¹²⁻¹⁴

brings us nearer the priesthood should see that zeal increased multifold so that, when the day of our ordination comes, God may find us less unworthy of his sacred ministry. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,*¹ says the great Apostle. To accomplish this, even with generous zeal, our seminary life will prove all too short.

The retreat is an occasion for us to take our bearings, to examine our progress during the preceding year. And the result of our thoughtful introspection under the favoring conditions of a retreat and the inspiration of God's grace, will be to spur us on to greater striving.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Why is it, dear Lord, that after many retreats I have made so little progress? The fault is not to be found in the retreats themselves but in my dispositions and lack of co-operation. I, on my part, must fulfill with strict fidelity the conditions indispensable to the success of a retreat. They are chiefly these four: external silence, interior recollection, the exercises, and practical resolutions.

¹ PHILIP., 2^d

1. *External silence.* The retreat is not so much a particular exercise of piety, but rather a time in which all our pious exercises have place, a week of intensified spiritual life. However, to be thus consecrated exclusively to the affairs of the soul presupposes that it be kept absolutely free from external dissipations which are obstacles to the sanctifying action of God's grace. By observing the rule of silence, we will be free from the greater part of outer distractions. If we are in earnest, we will also refrain from every unnecessary occupation not immediately connected with the retreat, such as letter-writing, secular reading, and the numerous little material concerns of an ordinary day. Without this external silence the recollection proper to a retreat is impossible.

2. *Interior recollection.* This is the most essential and all-pervading element of the retreat. Other conditions are intended to make this possible and more profound or else are its result. Each exercise should be followed by a period of recollection for us to apply its fruit to the needs of our soul. Our retreat will be successful according to the degree of our recollection.

3. *The exercises.* The purpose of these is to aid our recollection, the importance of which

urges us to follow the exercises with close attention and with a personal application to ourselves.

4. *The resolutions*, which are obviously and most naturally the result of a good retreat. But if they are to have any effect on our lives, they must be specific and practical and not too numerous. To insure their fulfillment we need also to determine definitely the means of carrying them out.

Is it not probable that my former retreats produced no greater and more enduring effects because I was not faithful to these conditions? Have I not been guilty of neglecting the abundant grace which God showers down in times of retreat?

Grant, my God, that I may profit by this powerful means of sanctification. May I not be like the stony ground that remains unfruitful in spite of plenteous rain and sunshine. I will strive by sincere coöperation to merit thy blessing upon my retreat.

I resolve to observe conscientiously the conditions essential to a good retreat.

*Intrate toti, manete soli, exite alii.*¹

¹ ST. BERNARD.

XVI

STUDY AS AN OBLIGATION

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our divine Master who imposes on priests and seminarians the obligation of study. We will recall the recommendations of St. Paul, of the Fathers, and of other ecclesiastical writers in regard to this duty. The Councils of the Church have also been occupied with this subject. In all these prescriptions we will recognize the work of the Holy Spirit.

II. We will consider the universal law of labor, our special duty of study, and the happy influence that the habit of study will exercise on our life.

1. *The universal law of labor*, imposed by God upon the human race. The principal work required of us is study.

2. *Study is our special duty* here in the seminary. Did not Christ say to his disciples: *You are the light of the world?* And again, when commissioning his apostles: *Teach all nations?* The knowledge necessary for a faithful ministry supposes a preparation of serious study.

3. *The habit of study exercises a happy influence on the life of seminarian and priest.* If studious, we will also be fervent in the cultivation of priestly virtues. The habit of study fortifies a priest against worldliness and safeguards his virtue.

III. We will humble ourselves when we reflect upon the studiousness of many who have only natural motives to stimulate their energy. We will examine ourselves to discover how we employ the time that should be consecrated to study. We will implore the help of God's grace to increase our courage in the pursuit of study.

We will resolve:

1. To make waste of time a serious object for our examination of conscience;

2. If we are priests, to consider it a grave duty to prepare studiously for the sermons, instructions, etc. that we may be obliged to give.

Sit doctrina vestra spiritualis medicina populo Dei.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our divine Master who imposes on priests and seminarians the duty of study.

Among the recommendations that St. Paul offers to his disciple Timothy for the formation of priestly virtues, is application to study. *Attend unto reading*,¹ he says. And in another letter to the same Timothy, he writes: *All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice.*² This knowledge, however, can not be acquired without study.

¹ I TIM. 4¹³

² II TIM. 3¹⁶

The Fathers and other ecclesiastical writers, inspired by the Old Testament precept that the priests should know the law, constantly inculcate the necessity of study for the clergy. *If you aspire to the priesthood, says St. Jerome, you must study in order that you may be able to teach.*¹ He wishes priests to read the Holy Scriptures constantly. *Therefore let the divine Scriptures be ever in your hands,*² are his words. And again: *Read the divine Scriptures often. Learn what you must teach.*³ And St. Ambrose asks: *Why should you not employ in reading those hours when you are not in the church?*⁴ *If ignorance is scarcely tolerable in a layman, St. Leo says, how much more inexcusable is it in those who must lead?*⁵ In the words of St. Bernard: *What perils are to be feared when the pastor does not know how to find the pastures, when the guide is ignorant of the road, when the Savior's minister does not know his Master's will?*⁶

¹ EP. IV AD RUST.

² EP. XIV AD CELAM.

³ EP. II AD NEP.

⁴ OFFIC. XX.

⁵ EP. XXII.

⁶ DECLAM. CH. 6

Again and again the Council of Trent in its decrees, particularly in those which treat of seminaries, insists upon the importance of a high standard of learning for the clergy and upon the need of study to acquire it. Likewise the provincial councils of later times have been especially occupied with this matter and have sought to renew the love of study among the clergy. Precisely this is the purpose of the diocesan conferences and the examinations of the junior clergy.

In all these prescriptions, we see the work of the divine Spirit watching over the clergy, not only to instil into God's priests the sanctity that makes them the salt of the earth, but also the knowledge that makes them the light of the world. That we may not be remiss in this duty, let us ask our Savior to make us appreciate, by our meditation, the need of study to increase our fondness for it, and to strengthen our will against the obstacles that interfere with its pursuit.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

All priests have, in the sight of God, an obligation to study. This duty, however, is very particularly that of seminarians.

1. *The universal law of labor*, which, when applied to a seminarian's life, means principally the obligation of study. Did not God impose it upon the human race when he created man? Moreover, the need of methodical application to some useful pursuit is founded in man's very nature and his relations to his fellow creatures. Only with the coöperation of man's labor will the earth nourish us and its products be transformed to serve our use. It is also a work of labor to cultivate our minds so that we may come into possession of the truths which it behooves us to know and impart to others.

Nothing great, nothing beautiful, nothing good is accomplished in human affairs without labor. Whatever period of the world's progress we examine, we find every success the reward of laborious enterprise. Great men's lives are records of untiring application which, if it be well directed and of more than usual intensity, we call genius. While the pages of history shine with the names of illustrious heroes who have won their fame not without great labor, so too the glorious heroes of God whose names are written in the book of life have gained their high place in heaven after a life of devoted activity in God's holy service.

St. Paul, St. Gregory the Great, St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, and a host of others—we marvel at the results that each accomplished in a single life-time, and our zeal should be stimulated by their noble example. We live in an age that glorifies labor and in a land where strenuosity is the motto. This atmosphere of rivalrous activity ought to arouse our zeal. Idleness, far from being esteemed or respected, is regarded as a vice; and to-day more than ever before, the principle enunciated by the Apostle of the Gentiles is universally recognized: *If any man will not work, neither let him eat.*¹

For us to slothfully shirk our duty would be a sinful disgrace. It should make us blush with shame to seek an easy life, supported by others' labor while the world about us is toiling so energetically. By idleness we violate the providential order of God who gives us time that we should employ it to advantage, powers of mind and body that we should use them in his service.

The millions must labor in the sweat of their brow, in the fields, the factories, the various industrial and commercial occupations.

¹ II THESS. 3¹⁰

Others there are whose work is mainly intellectual. To these latter we belong. To develop our mind by study, to increase our store of knowledge is therefore a strict obligation for us; study, together with spiritual exercises, the great duty of our present state of life as seminarians. Not to devote ourselves seriously to a life of study means necessarily that we are guilty of a slothful waste of time.

2. *Study is our special duty* here in the seminary. If we wish to be profitable servants of Christ in the holy priesthood, we must become learned; for knowledge has always been considered, and justly so, as a possession of the priesthood. Did not Christ say: *You are the light of the world?*¹ And before ascending to heaven, did he not confide to his apostles and their successors the mission of instructing the world? *Teach ye all nations,*² was their commission.

Let us consider the three principal duties of a priest in carrying out this mission: clearly and precisely to explain to the people the doctrine of salvation; to defend the faith from hostile attacks; and to counsel the faithful

¹ ST. MATTH. 5¹⁴

² ST. MATTH. 28¹⁹

and direct them in the spiritual life. Truly in this we see a great responsibility for which even the most assiduous application to study will be none too thorough a preparation. That minimum of sacred knowledge, without which we should not presume to enter the priesthood, is yet sufficient to occupy us daily for the few years of our seminary life.

During this short period we can not hope to acquire more than a foundation in sacred science, upon which, however, during the years of our ministry, we should build, constructing the edifice of Christian learning at greater leisure and with more mature judgment than we could have done in the seminary. Indeed it would be a serious mistake to think that our studies should be completely discontinued when we enter upon the sacred ministry. We have, in fact, only been introduced to the various branches of clerical study. What would we think of a physician or a lawyer or any other professional man in the world who should abandon study as soon as he entered upon his practice?

To be sure, our ministry is a busy one, much taken up with the actual care and guidance of souls. But let us not soothe our conscience with this pretext as an excuse from the duty

of study. Few priests there are among us who could not find several hours every week for study if only we made a sincere and generous effort. The very exercise of the ministry should stimulate our zeal to equip ourselves better for it. There are societies to be instructed, children to be prepared for the sacraments, pious souls to be guided, inquirers to be answered, perhaps a school to be directed. But for these and other activities, how much more efficient would we be as instruments in God's hands if we never lost the habit of study?

3. *The habit of study exercises a happy influence on the life of seminarian and priest.* Among the elements that go to make up a seminarian's life or that of a priest, there is a close connection, such that lack of fidelity to one important duty leads to neglect in the performance of others. Such is the case with study. If a seminarian is studious, gladly imposing on himself the sacrifices and effort required by his work, he will probably be fervent in the cultivation of priestly virtues, exercising the same generous good will as in his studies. Hence his character will grow in firmness, gravity, seriousness, such as befits one who has a deep, holy purpose in life. He realizes that he has freely entered this seminary for a certain

definite, and necessary training, of which study is a most important part. The same good reason will prompt him to observe the rule and use those other means, found in our life here, which are conducive to that same end. Then, too, the habit of application to study, by developing the spirit of reflection, predisposes him to prayer.

But how different with one who is not studious! The courage that he lacks for study he lacks also for the rest. He finds no attraction in the society of his books and consequently, to wile away the hours that should be given to study, he devotes his precious time to useless and trifling distractions, perhaps wasting the time of his fellow-seminarians as well. And worse evils may befall him, for idleness is the devil's opportunity. So will he drift through the years of his novitiate but little affected by his holy environment, without the strong virtues of a priestly character that would have been imprinted in his soul had he been faithful to his duties of study and piety.

What influence will the habit of study exercise in the life of a priest? It has been said that work is always a good moral influence. This is no less true of us than of other men. But study is part of a priest's work. And it is

especially salutary to occupy the time that would otherwise be idly lost or misspent.

It also fortifies us against worldliness. Although it is not desirable that a priest exercising the sacred ministry should seek to imitate the life of the cloister, yet it is well for him to be interested in some studious pursuit that will enable him to pass pleasantly and profitably the hours spent in his room and not otherwise devoted to the ministry. He will be less eager for worldly recreations.

Study is also a safeguard for our virtue. When is it that we are most exposed to temptation; when, as a matter of fact, do we most frequently fall into sin? Surely it is not while actually engaged in our priestly work but rather during our leisure intervals. Let us, therefore, seek to occupy these periods with useful study.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

There are men in the world devoting themselves whole-heartedly to study, for that purpose pursuing long and laborious researches and making tremendous sacrifices. Some are impelled by a natural love of learning, others by the desire for fame among men of letters and science, and others attracted by the pros-

pect of temporal gain as their reward. Is it possible, my God, that I, who should have such infinitely nobler motives, am less interested in study than they?

Lacking an earnest devotion to this serious duty, is it not true that in consequence I waste much time every week or every day that ought to be occupied with study? A moment's reflection shows me that to pass my examinations, to perform the minimum that is required, is by no means a sign that I have quite fulfilled my duty. If, thanks to God's bounteous gifts, I can acquire knowledge with facility, I should keep in mind these words of the Master: *Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required.*¹

I implore the help of thy grace, dear Lord, to elevate my ideal and to give me courage in its pursuit. Give my soul energy to overcome that indolence which shirks the labor of study. Grant that I may have a supernatural love for this duty, free from motives of pride or self-seeking.

I resolve:

1. To make waste of time a serious object for my examination of conscience;

¹ ST. LUKE 12⁴⁸

2. If I am a seminarian, to prepare for each class and to coöperate with the instruction by diligent study;

3. If I am a priest, to consider it a grave duty to prepare studiously for the sermons, instructions, etc. that I may be obliged to give.

*Sit doctrina vestra spiritualis medicina populo Dei.*¹

¹ PONTIFICAL.

XVII

THE SANCTIFICATION OF STUDY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our divine Master, who possesses the fulness of supernatural knowledge. We will honor the communication thereof by which he nourishes and strengthens the souls of men. We will admire that company of illustrious doctors who shine so brilliantly in the glorious crown of the Church's triumph. And we will thank our Savior for the treasure of truth with which he has thus enriched the Church.

II. We will consider the means of sanctifying our study.

1. *We should prepare for it by prayer*, especially by yielding ourselves completely to the spirit of God's divine Son and adoring Christ as our Master.

2. *We should study in the spirit of penance*. With the advent of sin into the world, came painful labor. We ought to accept the difficulties of study in a penitential spirit.

3. *We should thank God for the gift of knowledge*. When we think of the vast majority deprived of the knowledge which we may acquire, we should understand what a privilege is ours and should gratefully strive to become less unworthy recipients of God's generous bounty.

4. *We should have supernatural intentions in our studies.* Not only should they be free from pride and ambition, not only good in themselves, but they should be Christian motives, namely, the honor of the priesthood and the sanctification of souls.

III. We will ask ourselves whether our intentions have been really supernatural. We will pray to Christ that he be our guide and example and cleanse our heart from all unworthy motives.

We will resolve:

1. In the course of our study as well as at the beginning, to raise our heart to God and offer it all to him;

2. To purify the motives of our study.

Jesum quærens in libris.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our divine Master, Jesus Christ, who possesses the fulness of supernatural knowledge that should adorn the soul of his priest. *In whom*, says St. Paul, speaking of Christ, *are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*¹ Not that profane knowledge which human genius attains by its own effort, such as the pagan philosophers possessed, and which is also the boast of the sages of our own day;

¹ COLOSS. 2^s

but a wisdom which the spirit of God imparts to those who seek it humbly, a wisdom human and divine, the fruit of study and prayer.

Let us pay a tribute of respect to the communication of this higher knowledge by which the incarnate Word enlightens our minds: *the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world.*¹ Far from injuring our piety, it rather nourishes and strengthens it; far from producing presumption and vanity, rather, by bringing us before the divine source of all truth, it keeps us in humility and simplicity of heart. Let us do reverence, therefore, to that company of illustrious doctors who, by their learning in sacred science, shine so brilliantly in the glorious crown of the Church's triumph. For in them we see how the highest learning may be harmonized with simple piety. With untiring energy and devotedness they gave themselves to the work of study; but above all, they were men of prayer. It was before the tabernacle and at the foot of the crucifix even more than in books that they sought for truth. Passionately fond of science, which they regarded as an emanation of divine light, nevertheless higher than all they placed

¹ ST. JOHN 1^o

divine charity, willing, as the learned and pious Suarez expresses it, to sacrifice all their books for one act of the love of God. They neglected no means at their disposal to enrich their minds with useful knowledge; but, as the end and reward of all their efforts, considered only the glory of God, the defense of the Church, and the salvation of souls. If Christ had said to them as to St. Thomas: "You have written well in my praise; what reward do you wish?" they would have made the same reply: "None but Thee, O Lord."

Let us thank our Savior for the treasure of truth with which he has enriched the Church by these venerable teachers of sacred science. On many of them is bestowed the double glory of doctor and saint. Since, by our vocation, we are also called to be the light of the world, we ask of thee, dear Lord, through their intercession, the grace to know, as they did, how to devote ourselves to studious research without detriment to our piety.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

All our acts should have a supernatural character, should contribute to the sanctification of our soul, should be meritorious of eternal

life. How especially, therefore, should it be so with our studies since they occupy so considerable a place in our daily occupations?

There are men who consume their lives in scientific investigations and who apply their minds to lofty speculations or to the material universe but, in studying the work of God's hand, do not think to raise their mind and heart to the Author of all. Their studies, which should lead them to God, do, as a fact, estrange them from him; the more extensive becomes their knowledge, the more are they enclosed by the darkness of unbelief. How truly the words of St. Paul apply to them: *When they knew God, they have not glorified him as God, or given thanks; but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*¹

Let us consider the means by which we can guard ourselves from this same misfortune.

1. *We should prepare for study by prayer, especially by yielding ourselves completely to the spirit of God's divine Son, that we may study in the light of his truth, confessing that without him we are apt to be immersed in the darkness of error and unbelief.*

¹ ROM. 1²¹⁻²²

In the Holy Trinity, the Word is the divine mirror in which God, contemplating his own image, sees all truth: *the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty*,¹ says Holy Writ. In the light of the Word it is that we perceive some rays of truth which God possesses in all fulness. And, if this is so of all truth whatsoever, is it not particularly so of revelation, the special object of a priest's study?

Therefore, before beginning to study, we should adore the incarnate Word as our Master, acknowledging our need of being enlightened by him, asking him to direct and guide our mind in the acquisition of knowledge. And when, in the course of our study, we encounter difficulty or obscurity, again let us humbly ask his help.

2. *We should study in the spirit of penance.* With the advent of sin into the world, came painful labor. *Cursed is the earth in thy work*, God said to Adam after the fall; *with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life*.² And to acquire the fruit of knowledge is also a laborious process. Whoever thinks

¹ WIS. 7²⁶

² GEN. 3¹⁷

that learning is to be acquired by passively receiving instruction without active labor on his own part, has not understood how to study. The treasures of science, like precious metals that lie hid in the bosom of the earth, can be possessed only by means of long and earnest effort.

Let us accept these difficulties in the spirit of penance for our sins. And instead of being discouraged thereby, let us see in them a means of expiation. We will address God in these words of a pious author: "Thou willest that knowledge be acquired by labor. I am satisfied, O my God. . . Thou hast placed the sweet substance of knowledge in the midst of thorns and hast coated it with bitterness that we might taste thereof with some affliction."¹

3. *We should thank God for the gift of knowledge.* When we think of the vast majority deprived of the knowledge which we may acquire, because they have not our opportunity, when we think of the sacrifices which some make in order to obtain an education, when we call to mind that our many years of schooling have been a double burden to our good parents because of the expense and because

¹ OLIER : *Journée chrétienne.*

it deprived them of our support, and especially when we realize that, without any desert of ours, God has chosen us out of the great crowd, *who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*,¹ then must we understand what a privilege is ours.

How grateful we should be to almighty God for this favor and out of thankfulness how faithfully we should serve him, striving earnestly to correspond with his graces so as to become a less unworthy recipient of his generous bounty!

4. *We should have supernatural intentions in our studies.* By this means and this alone do our acts possess a meritorious value in the sight of God.

In the first place there are some unworthy motives that we should be at pains to avoid: pride, which aspires to excel others; vanity, which seeks praise and high esteem; ambition and cupidity, which would make all things serve self-interest and preferment. But in order to escape these dangers, we must not lose our zeal and interest in study but rather supernaturalize it. Many are moved by a disinterested longing for knowledge, by the very joy to be found therein. Although good in itself,

¹ I PET. 2⁹

this motive will not suffice to give our study the Christian and priestly character which it should have.

We ought to desire thus to enhance the honor of the priesthood. Then, too, the thought of the greater good we can do for souls by our better preparation and the incalculable injury that may ensue from our ignorance should be a most stimulating reflection. Lastly, we find in study a sure fulfillment of God's will in our regard since we are certain that, in addition to our spiritual exercises, it is the great duty which God requires of us in the seminary.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Study occupies so considerable a part of my time in the seminary and is of such supreme importance that my life here may properly be called a life of study. If I neglect to quicken it with supernatural intentions, how great is my loss in the sight of God? Knowledge itself will not please God, will not save my soul; but if I am moved to acquire it by love for him, by zeal for the salvation of souls, and by other motives on which I have just meditated, I will find therein a continual source of merit.

It is encouraging for me to reflect that the Christian motives which will sanctify my stud-

ies are suggested by the very nature of these studies themselves.

But have I habitually done so? Or, on the contrary, has my application to study been not different from that of young men pursuing their studies in the world? Have I not often studied with such a disregard for supernatural motives as might befit a pagan?

My God, I reproach myself with serious neglect in the sanctification of my studies, and I purpose to correct this fault. I will study as a Christian should, so that the fulfillment of this duty may be for me, as it has been for many priests, a means of procuring thy greater glory and of saving souls. Of thee, my Savior, I ask the grace to strengthen my will in this good purpose. Be thou my guide and my example. Cleanse my heart from all motives of personal interest, from all presumption and vanity, from rashness; grant that my studies may lead me to thee and unite me ever more closely to thee.

I resolve:

1. In the course of my study as well as at the beginning, to raise my heart to God and offer all my work to him;

2. To purify the motives of my study.

*Jesum quærens in libris.*¹

¹ ST. AUGUSTINE.

XVIII

HOLY SCRIPTURE

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the Son of God revealing himself to us in Holy Scripture. In divers manners has he spoken, but never elsewhere so directly and perfectly. Here we have truly the word of God. After the Eucharist, the Bible is our most precious treasure. The Church regards it with great veneration.

II. We will meditate upon the Bible as a literary work, as a book of Christian piety, and as the object of priestly study.

1. *The Bible as a literary work.* Its literary excellence is incomparable. But this is even surpassed by the richness of its contents.

2. *The Bible as a book of Christian piety.* Here we find light, consolation, and strength. It discloses what we must believe, how we ought to live and for what we may hope, laying before us the foundation of our religion. And it speaks also to our heart.

3. *The Bible as an object of priestly study.* It is the privileged duty of the priest to preserve and defend it. Therein should he seek the great source of religious science. And he will find there also abundant instruction and exhortation for his preaching.

III. We will acknowledge that there are men of the world who are urged by their love of knowledge to study the Bible much more than we do. We will ask our Savior to give us a sincere love for the word of God.

We will resolve:

1. To read the Bible daily;
2. To approach the study of Holy Scripture in a spirit of faith, docility, and respect.

The law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls: the testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the Son of God revealing himself to us in Holy Scripture. In divers manners has he spoken. The texts of the liturgy, the authoritative teaching of Councils, the writings of holy doctors, spiritual books, all contain God's word, but in a way less direct and less perfect than Holy Scripture.

The Bible is, in relation to the other manifestations of revealed truth, what the voice is to its echo. We acknowledge therein the assistance of the Holy Spirit showing us the way that leads to salvation, for the Church teaches that the Bible is truly inspired, that the sacred writers have been moved, directed, and enlightened by the Spirit of God. So in the

Creed we profess to believe in the Holy Ghost *who spoke by the prophets*. Holy Scripture is therefore properly called the word of God.

This prerogative of inspiration becomes evident, in some degree, to anyone who peruses its pages attentively. Compare it with those books produced by the genius even of saintly men. What a difference! A divine breath, not easily defined but of which we are conscious, animates the inspired text and gives to the Bible a unique character found in no other work. Man, merely by his own powers, has never written so.

After the Blessed Eucharist, which contains really and substantially the body and blood of Christ, we have nothing more venerable and holy than the Bible, which contains his word; earth possesses no more precious treasure.

With what veneration does the Church regard this sacred deposit entrusted to her! She guards the text with such a religious care; there was a time when she kept it in the tabernacle beside the Blessed Sacrament; and she wishes it to be placed on a throne where councils assemble to decide questions of dogma or discipline.

Love for the inspired word should be deeply seated in the soul of every priest. Let us ask

our Lord that we should more and more love to read and study Holy Writ and meditate upon its contents.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Holy Scripture is of the highest interest for all. The Christian finds in it an inspiration for his piety; but especially ought the priest to make it the object of his continual study and meditation. Let us consider it as a literary work, as a book of Christian piety, and as an object of priestly study.

1. *The Bible as a literary work.* Aside from its inspiration, which makes it a work divine, the Bible is superior to any book that has come from the hand of man. Its literary excellence is incomparable. Where can we read more engaging narratives than the principal parts of Genesis and the historical books of the Old and New Testament? Where, in the entire range of human literature, are to be found the grace and truth and simplicity of the gospel parables?

The prophetic books and the epistles of St. Paul are models of eloquence. And there is not in any language a rival to the poetry of Job and the Psalms. Fenelon, in his *Dialogues*

on Eloquence, says: "Scripture infinitely surpasses profane authors in simplicity, in vivacity, in grandeur. Never has even Homer approached the sublimity of Moses in his Canticles. .

. . . Never did a Greek or Latin ode obtain the loftiness of the Psalms. . . . There is as much difference between the profane poets and the prophets as between real enthusiasm and assumed."¹

But the literary merit of our sacred books is even surpassed by the richness of their contents: history, philosophy, morality. From the historic point of view the Bible is, by its antiquity and authenticity, the most precious document that we possess. Attempts have been made to compare it with the religious books of China, India, and Persia. But it is really beyond such a comparison. On the one hand we have an indubitable antiquity, an historic account, an undeniable character of truth; on the other hand is an uncertain origin, a mixture of fables and disconnected fragments from which it is impossible to construct an historical narrative.

The philosophical truths of deepest import that we learn from the Bible form a priceless

¹ THIRD DIALOGUE

Christian heritage. And what can we say of the sublime purity of its moral teaching? Is it not, when compared even with the loftiest systems of non-Christian philosophy and morality, as day compared with night?

2. *The Bible as a book of Christian piety.* We adore the word of God by which he has deigned to address us for our instruction and by which he would guide us through this world to life eternal. This divine word comes to enlighten our obscurity, to console our sorrow, to support and strengthen us in trial and temptation. It discloses what we need to know for our salvation, what we must believe, how we ought to live, and for what we may hope.

These books of history, prophecy, dogma, and morals of which the inspired word is composed, lay before us the foundation of our religion. Therein we read the prophetic announcements about the Messiah, which in the fulness of time were accomplished in our Savior Jesus Christ, his life and miracles, his heavenly doctrines, the narrative of his mission on earth and of the institution of the Church which he founded for our salvation and sanctification: such is the divine teaching contained in Sacred Scripture. Any Christian who reads it and meditates upon it with proper dispositions will

find in it a support for his faith, nourishment for his piety, guidance for the perfection of his life.

But the word of God brings us not only the light of inspired truth; it speaks also to our heart. For the spirit of God has imparted to it a sacred character, a holy unction possessed by no other writings, a divine power to purify our soul, to detach our hearts from things earthly and arouse our longings for the blessed reward of eternal life. *The teaching of Christ, says the author of the Imitation, surpasseth all the teachings of the saints; and he that hath his his spirit will find therein a hidden manna.*¹

The Macchabees, the in midst of the many tribulations by which they were afflicted, felt no need of any other human consolation, *having for our comfort, they said, the holy books that are in our hands.*² Such also was the veneration which the early Christians entertained for the Holy Scriptures, cherishing them as a precious relic, reading them assiduously, wishing also that they be placed beside their body in the tomb.

3. *The Bible as an object of priestly study.*

¹ IMIT. I, 1.

² I MACCH. 12⁹

While it is useful for all Christians to read the Scriptures, for the priest a serious study of the Bible is absolutely necessary. Quite properly has the Bible been called *liber sacerdotalis*, for it is the book that we should love above all others that we should read again and again, meditate upon, and make the object of earnest study.

The Bible is a precious treasure in the possession of the Church and is entrusted to our care, not only that we may preserve it, but also that we should defend it against the attacks of unbelievers who seek to undermine its inspired character as well as the human authority which belongs to it. Therefore is it incumbent upon us to acquire a knowledge of Scriptural science sufficiently extensive and profound to demonstrate the falsity of the hostile attacks that would undermine its authenticity, its integrity, and its truthfulness.

In the second place, the Bible contains the foundation of that religious science which, as a direct consequence of our vocation, we are bound to acquire. For it is principally upon Scriptural texts that theology depends to prove its dogmas. Hence it is necessary that we be acquainted with the sacred text, that we learn its true sense so as to deduce from it solid

arguments in defense of Catholic dogma and to refute false interpretations.

For the preacher of God's word the Bible is the richest source of instruction and exhortation. St. Paul points it out to his disciple Timothy as the book that ought to serve as the basis for the instruction that he should impart to the faithful. *All scripture, inspired of God, he writes, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice.*¹ We know that the Fathers of the Church, following this recommendation of the apostle, preached the word of God and that alone. They commented upon it and explained it to the people gathered around their pulpit and from it drew powerful exhortations. So completely were they penetrated with the Scripture by force of constant reading thereof that their very style took on something of the form peculiar to Holy Writ itself. We, too, are sent to preach the word of God to the people. We, too, must seek our inspiration in the sacred text and consider ourselves in the pulpit as the interpreters of the divine oracles. Let us therefore draw our instructions from the Bible so that it may truly

¹ II TIM. 3¹⁶

be said in St. Paul's words: *God as it were exhorting by us.*¹

Can we perform these important duties of the ministry efficiently if our knowledge of Scripture is nothing more than that derived from cursory reading of it? No, we must make it the object of deep and serious study which will give us a true understanding of its contents, enabling us to discern the literal sense which is the necessary basis for whatever applications we may make and putting us on our guard against inexact citations, arbitrary interpretations, and false accomodations. Let us apply to ourselves these words which St. Jerome addresses to a priest: *Read the divine Scriptures often; rather, never put the sacred reading out of your hands.*²

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, I know there are men of the world who are urged by their love of knowledge to devote themselves with intense earnestness to the study of the Bible. Protestant England and Germany and also this country of ours

¹ II COR. 5¹⁰

² EPIST. 34

count a great number of such scholars. Yet, for many of these, the Bible is not a divinely inspired book; it is simply a monument of a remote past, the text of which is a priceless document and an abundant mine for the philologist and the historian. Regarding Holy Scripture from this purely human point of view and biased by religious prejudices, they readily fall into erroneous interpretations in the course of their commentaries and critical studies. Nevertheless they devote their best energies to the study of this book and by reason of such research they possess a remarkably intimate knowledge of its contents.

Would we not be justly reproached if, believing in the inspiration of Scripture, knowing that it contains the word of God and the revealed doctrine of salvation, we, its depositaries and interpreters, should study it but indifferently? If, consuming our time in the reading of profane books, we should neglect to read the greatest book of all, if, instructed in human sciences, we should be ignorant of the inspired word, how would we excuse so gross a neglect at the judgment seat of almighty God?

Let us resolve:

1. To read the Bible daily.

2. To approach the study of Holy Scripture in a spirit of faith, docility and respect.

*The Law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls: the testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones.*¹

¹ Ps. 18³

XIX

THEOLOGY

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our blessed Lord assisting the Church in the development of theological science. In this science we will admire the union of human efforts with the supernatural action of the Holy Ghost. We will honor those holy doctors by whom it was founded and perfected.
- II. We will consider, in the study of theology, its subject, the advantages derived from it, and its necessity for a priest.

1. *The subject of theology* is more sublime than that of natural, social, or philosophical science, for it is the supernatural world as revealed to us by faith; God's triune nature, the incarnation of our Redeemer, the grace which he merited for us, the sacraments by which it comes to us, the Church which he instituted.

2. *The advantages derived from the study of theology.* It strengthens our faith, nourishes our piety and warns us against errors and inexact expressions of dogma.

3. *Its necessity for a priest.* As preacher and catechist, he must be able to set forth clearly the doctrine of salvation; as apologist, he must be able to defend the faith; as director of souls, he needs the guiding principles of moral theology.

III. We will renew our esteem for this sacred science. And we will see that it deserves our attentive study throughout our priestly life.

We will resolve to devote to theology the utmost thoroughness of which we are capable.

The lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth.

I. ADORATION

Among the fruits produced by the divine assistance which our Lord gives the Church, is the science of theology. Scripture and tradition contain the elements; but to arrange these elements in a regular body of doctrine, to show their harmonious accord, to deduce other truths therefrom, in a word, to develop a systematic science, man's genius has, in a certain way, complemented the divine work of revelation.

The supernatural action of the Holy Ghost was not a stranger to this work. At the times appointed by God's providence, he has raised illustrious doctors who, by their learning, have little by little constructed the majestic edifice of Catholic theology the proportions and solidity of which we so justly admire. Thus grouped and combined, the dogmas of our faith present a complete and harmonious whole

the parts of which are linked together, mutually supporting, explaining, and clarifying one another. Without losing the mysterious character inherent in supernatural truths, they are made clearer by the light of reason which helps us to comprehend their beauty and fitness while also demonstrating the foundations on which they rest and their perfect accord with the truths of human science.

But theology is also a rampart by which the doctrines of the Church are protected and the assaults of unbelief and impiety repelled. The truths of revelation, bound together by means of theological deductions, are like an army drawn up in battle array, able to resist every attack.

In the first rank of saintly doctors by whom, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this great work has been elaborated, let us pay homage to St. John Damascene who was the founder of the sacred science in the East. But above all let us honor him who is called the Angel of the Schools, St. Thomas Aquinas, prince of theologians, whose learned writings have given theology its present definite form.

We thank thee, O Lord, that thou didst so richly endow the soul of thy blessed servant and we ask, through the intercession of this

patron of Catholic schools, the grace of a sincere love for the study of theology so that we will earnestly apply ourselves to it now in the seminary and later in the course of our priestly life.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider in the study of theology its subject, the advantages derived from it, and its necessity for a priest.

1. *The subject of theological study.* The natural sciences treat of the phenomena and laws of the material creation. Above these are the social sciences wherein we study the life and mechanism of human society. Higher yet is philosophy, which brings us to a knowledge of God's existence and treats, so far as merely human reason can, of his nature and attributes. Theology, still more sublime, enters even the supernatural world as revealed to us by faith, compared with which all the splendor of the natural world is but a pale reflection.

The loftiest height of theology is crowned by the study of the Holy Trinity. From philosophy we learn something of God as he is manifested in his creatures, whereas theology acquaints us with his mysterious triune nature, the eternal generation of the Son and the pro-

cession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son.

We learn also of the Incarnation, the mystery of God's divine Son become man, the personal union in Christ of two natures, human and divine; God's marvelous manifestation of love for man. By this mystery is bridged over the abyss which separated God from man, the Creator from the creature.

In the next place is the Redemption. The God-man, Jesus Christ, becomes the perfect Mediator between God and us. And he gives to the world the example of the most beautiful and holy life ever spent on earth. Having lived thirty-three years in our midst, preaching a divine doctrine, he died on the cross to redeem us, then arose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

The Redemption gives rise to another mystery, that of grace, which raises us by the merits of Christ to a participation in the divine nature. Theology examines the character of this gift of God and describes the effects that it produces in our soul, on which it bestows the light of faith and supernatural life. It shows us also in the sacraments the mysterious channels that communicate this grace to us. And, in fine, it makes us see in the Church the

spiritual kingdom of souls, struggling on earth, purified in purgatory, and triumphant in heaven.

This admirable body of doctrines is accompanied by the purest and most complete code of morals ever taught to man, a system in which the type of perfection proposed for our imitation is none other than God himself. What science ever presented to the human intellect an object of study so elevated, so vast, and so worthy of its application?

2. *The advantages derived from the study of theology.* It strengthens our faith. In the case of most Christians the motives of belief which faith presupposes and which are its logical preparation are not reasoned out. They believe but without giving themselves a reason for their faith; and often they would be unable to defend it. Now theology, by teaching us the well-founded basis on which our belief rests, shows us its reasonableness. Thanks to these deductions, Christian dogma appears to us clothed with the highest certitude to which the mind of man can attain. In short, by a series of rigorous and exact reasonings, it demonstrates the infallable authority of the Church derived from the divine mission of Christ, which, in turn, could not be denied

without at the same time rejecting God and his infinite perfections. With our faith thus fast rooted, not only do we believe more firmly but we also are prepared to defend our faith against those who attack it. The study of theology nourishes our piety. Its effect is different from that of the profane sciences which, while enlightening the mind, dry up the heart. On the contrary, by theology our thoughts are raised to God himself, his perfections, his love for us; to Christ, his mysteries, the testimonials of his tenderness; to the reward promised our fidelity: all these considerations are so many motives of Christian piety. We are not, therefore, surprised that the greatest theologians, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, Suarez, Gerson, Bellarmin, and so many others were at the same time men of eminent piety. It saw the torch of divine science that enkindled in them the fire of charity. The more brilliant was the light of things divine within their soul, the more did they feel drawn to love and serve God.

The study of theology will furnish us with a beacon light whereby to avoid those errors into which our reason, without this help, might be beguiled. Who does not know that the spirit of man is thus exposed even in the most sincere

search for truth? Genius or brilliancy of intellect is no guarantee of safety. There are, in nearly every branch of human knowledge, points of contact with revealed truth which need to be treated with great reserve. By lack of sufficient knowledge, we may easily fall into doctrinal errors or at least inexact expressions which may lead, in the minds of our hearers, to more serious consequences than we suppose. Speculative sciences there are which border on dogma, and practical sciences which enter the realm of morality. But theology will provide us with rules by which to avoid error therein, clearly marking out the lines that separate truth from error. And it teaches precision in whatever appertains to faith. That is why we can generally tell whether or not a man's writing is that of a theologian.

3. *The study of theology is necessary for a priest.* As the science of medicine is for the physician and law for the magistrate, so is theology obligatory for the priest; it is professional knowledge that may not be neglected without criminal injustice.

As preacher and catechist, he must be able to set forth the doctrine of salvation with conciseness, clearness, and precision, to dis-

tinguish in doctrinal statements what is of faith from what is not, what is certain from what is doubtful, what may be safely held from what it would be rash to maintain. All this surely supposes more than a superficial knowledge of theology. To give the most elementary instruction with perspicuity, to say comprehensively what ought to be said, neither more nor less, requires a considerable knowledge of the subject.

As apologist, the priest must know how to defend religion. Therefore must he be able to establish the foundation on which it rests, to explain the dogmas which are questioned, to justify them by showing that they do not conflict with reason, and to demonstrate that seeming contradictions which they present are only apparent. In this country of ours, are there not, within the reach of every priest, many souls outside the true fold who would become loyal children of Holy Church if only they knew the beauty and harmony and attractiveness of Catholic truth? There is only one way to prepare for this grave responsibility—by the serious study of theology.

The priest is also the counsellor and director of souls, which office is a delicate and difficult ministry that he can not properly perform

without an intimate knowledge of moral theology. He should be master of the principles that govern the administration of the sacraments, especially those concerning confession, the postponement or refusal of absolution; he must know the obligations of a penitent; he must be versed in the principles of the spiritual life and be able to judge the genuineness of a vocation. Is not the necessity of theological study for these duties quite evident? It needs to be seconded by good sense, tact, sound judgment and prudence, precious qualities that know no substitute. Yet even these qualities would be a false and unsafe guide if their exercise were not directed by the science of moral theology.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

After Holy Scripture, there is no science to which we should be more attached than to theology. As it is indispensably necessary for a priest, I would sin grievously by neglecting its study. For so extensive and difficult a science, long and serious application is required. By faithful study in the seminary, I may hope to acquire an introductory knowledge of theology which I should extend during my

life as a priest. *The Lord is the portion of my inheritance*, I said when I offered myself to God at the time of my tonsure. So is it my blessed privilege to devote myself particularly to the study of this science of God.

My God, I wish to grow more zealous for this study that is founded on thy word, that treats of thy adorable mysteries, whose object is to save and sanctify the souls of men. And if, at times, it becomes difficult by reason of its depth or intricacy, I will animate my courage by recalling that it is of thee I study and the happiness of knowing thee better will reward my efforts.

I resolve to devote to theology the utmost thoroughness of which I am capable.

*The lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth.*¹



¹ MALAC. 27

XX

CHURCH HISTORY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Savior who exercises so solicitous a providence over his Church. It is the city of God on earth. And the study of its history is of capital importance for us.

II. We will consider three characteristics of the Church's history as manifesting the indwelling spirit of Christ.

1. *The holiness of the Church.* The mortal life of Christ on earth was one of eminent sanctity. In the Church this holiness continues to find outward expression. We see it in the continuous succession of saints from the first Pentecost even down to our own times.

2. *The miraculous works of the Church.* We might say that every step of the Savior's way was marked by some work of his all-powerful mercy. In the Church, too, miraculous manifestations have uninterruptedly given proof of the divine life within her. The separated sects can lay claim to no such glory.

3. *The hatred and opposition towards the Church.* Christ's benevolent goodness met with ingratitude and injustice. Not otherwise has been the history of his Church.

III. We will pay homage to Christ living in the Church. And we will recognize the providential action of his divine presence guiding her.

We will resolve:

1. To seek in the study of Church History the hidden life of Christ.

2. To continue it when we shall have entered the priesthood.

Jesus Christ yesterday and to-day; and the same forever.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our divine Savior who exercises so solicitous and loving a providence over his Church. This holy Church, was the end to which the mysteries of his life were directed, the fruit of his suffering and death, the most wonderful creation of his almighty power. To human sight it has to day but a modest and obscure role in the world's drama; its history seems not to have the importance that is presented by the political annals of the nations. Occupied with the accounts of revolutions, conquests, wars, alliances, in a word, with the temporal events that constitute the life of human society, the world's historians speak of the Church only in so far as her action and influence are connected with these events.

And yet we know that the Church is the

city of God on earth, the purpose of his other works. Whatever be its apparent feebleness, it lives in a perfect security; not possessing the supports on which human societies rest their confidence, it places its trust in God, who has taken it under his care; and, although encompassed by hostile multitudes, fearlessly it passes through the different phases of its earthly pilgrimage, repeating the words of the prophet: *The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing. For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for thou art with me.*¹

Let us ask our Lord, by the love he has for the Church, to arouse in us the deep interest which the study of its history rightly deserves, to make us understand its capital importance in this very age, and to give us the good will to devote ourselves heartily to it.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Many are the reasons why we should read and study the history of the Church: the incomparable interest of the narratives; the close connection that it has with theology; the need

¹ PS. 22¹⁻⁴

of knowing it in order to meet the objections of religious enemies who to-day seek to establish their errors by means of history. But what ought especially to attract us is the fact that the life of the Church is the manifestation of the life of the incarnate Word abiding in it and continuing thereby to show himself to the world.

From the earthly life of our Savior, we may pick out these three striking characteristics: the holiness of his adorable person, his miraculous works, and the hatred and opposition which his beneficent goodness encountered. These very characteristics we may find in the life of the Church as revealed by her history.

1. *The holiness of the Church.* Christ manifested to the world a life of eminent holiness. Exempt from even the slightest taint of sin, without those imperfections, and weaknesses from which even the greatest saints are not free, his soul was the sanctuary of all virtues in the highest degree to which human nature can attain. However, because of the limits of his mortal life, his holiness could not manifest itself to its full extent. It is in the Church that his life continues to find outward expression. By his presence there, imparting spiritual life to the members, he has found a device

by which to disclose to the world the riches of his holiness. Thus multiplying himself, if we may so speak, he has practiced holiness in every condition, at every age, in every state of life and every situation in which man lives on earth. This sanctity of the Son of God has continually shone forth in his Church from the day of its birth down to our own times.

We see it epitomized in the Church coming forth on that first Pentecost. A divine spirit evidently animated the new society and made of it miraculously a perfect, holy life. Soon the scene that we witness grows larger. Christ suffers in the martyrs; and the Church, multiplying in numbers with the very shedding of their blood, fills the world and transforms it. What wonderful fruits of virtue were produced in the Church by the divine life circulating through it? The study of church history will by no means disclose them all. But it will bring before us many lofty examples, especially in the lives of the saints, who are the glory of the Church. Through them above all Christ reveals himself, in them is his presence palpable.

On this common basis of Christian heroism that we find in all the saints, what an admirable variety of coloring separates them from

one another, giving each his own peculiar features and character, enabling us to perceive in each, so to speak, the adorable spirit of Christ! For it is he I ought always to recognize and honor in these truly great men and women. Thus in holy monarchs I honor his humble and modest grandeur, in saintly popes his zeal and vigilance, in good priests his spirit of religion, in saintly monks his poverty and mortification, and in virgins his purity.

2. *The miraculous works of the Church.* Christ's earthly life was marked by many miracles which he performed to establish the authenticity of his mission: his very conception in the womb of the blessed Virgin was miraculous. We might say that during the years of his public ministry, every step was marked by some work of his all-powerful mercy, crowned by the supreme miracles of his resurrection and ascension.

From the gospel narrative we learn also that, before leaving the earth, he promised to his followers that through them he would continue to multiply his prodigies. And this astonishing word of the divine Master has been ever since fulfilled in the Church, whose history, at almost every page, is marked by stupendous miracles. They are undeniable facts which,

by their frequency and supernatural character, defy the critic's attempts to explain by natural causes; and one can not question their existence without calling into doubt the most amply attested facts of history.

The annals of the Church abound in authentic accounts of miracles performed by the saints during their life or through their intercession after their death. Never, even to our own day, has there been any period in which the presence of our Lord has not been manifested in the miracles of the Church's life.

The sects which are multiplied in the Christian world and which call themselves the true Church of Christ are altogether without this visible sign of Christ's presence. Is not this an appealing proof of the divinity of the Catholic Church, a consoling testimony by which our Savior proclaims that it is indeed the society founded by him the true fold into which his flock is gathered, the city where he reigns, the spiritual skiff which he pilots, the holy ark by which men are to be saved?

So striking and beyond question is this contrast between the Catholic Church and the separated sects, that the latter have perforce made no attempts to claim a similar glory. Until recently they were wont to deny the

miraculous facts in the life of the Church; now, however, having admitted in the face of overwhelming evidence, that such stupendous facts have occurred in the Church, they seek to explain away their supernatural character; having at length granted that the Church has all along been right in regard to the facts, they are not prepared to concede that she is also in possession of the explanation, namely the indwelling of the spirit of her divine founder.

3. *The hatred and opposition to the Church.* The life of Christ on earth was marked by continual good works. *He went about doing good,*¹ is the simple but admirable praise recorded of his ministry. To all he was divinely benevolent and upon none did he ever inflict an injury. Hence we should expect to see him met at every step by consoling gratitude. Quite otherwise was the fact. The bitterest passions aroused themselves to attack him and his teaching: an object of hatred, calumny, brutal insult, and outrageous injustice, he was finally condemned to undergo the ignominious death of a criminal. The same passions and ingratitude pursue him living in the Church, where he continues his life of good works.

¹ ACTS 10³⁸

This presence of Christ in his mystical body becomes ever more evident to us as we study the history of the Church more deeply.

The Church has been for the human race a most beneficent mother, her progress through the Christian centuries an uninterrupted succession of benefits to mankind, inspired by charity, so that we might well say that she goes about doing good. Not only does she rescue souls from eternal perdition, but her solicitude extends also to the present life. If, even from the point of view of temporal prosperity, the modern world so far surpasses the culture of pagan antiquity, is it not due, most of all, to the Church that has cherished the arts and sciences which adorn our civilization to-day? Yet her history, from which we learn these her claims to our grateful recognition, attests also that the world has recompensed them by a strange ingratitude.

The Church militant, as we call her, must ever struggle against hatred and opposition: and thus is fulfilled the prophecy uttered by our Lord when he said to his disciples: *If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.*¹ Violent efforts have been made to stifle her

¹ ST. JOHN 15²⁰

in the blood of her children; and the persecution of oppression which, to accomplish the same purpose, has deprived the Church of most legitimate rights and impeded her divine mission by countless obstacles, has been not less bitter. Even that protection extended to her by Christian states, with jealous pretensions and unjust distrust, has often been a greater danger to the Church than open persecution.

Such is the struggle set forth in the annals of Church history; a sad spectacle, to be sure, yet full of consolation and hope. The persecuting hatred that followed the person of our Savior even to his death was but the precedent of his glorious triumph; after the passion came the resurrection. So too will it be with the trials undergone by the Church. It is Christ who suffers in her, who bears the hatred and insult offered to her. *Why persecutest thou me?* he said to Saul of Tarsus because of his strenuous opposition to the infant Church. But Jesus will also triumph in the Church.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My Savior, it is true that, when I study the history of the Church, it is the continuation of thy life I study. Thy divine life, announced

in ancient prophecy, prefigured by the rites of the Old Law, set forth in the gospel narrative, and preached by the apostles, continues to manifest itself in the Church. *Jesus Christ, yesterday, and to-day; and the same for ever.*¹ Thou dost appear under a double aspect: in the first, as described by the evangelists, all pure, holy, and divine; in the second, as living in the Church, which is human as well as divine, or rather in which the divine lies hidden beneath the weakness of humanity. Thou permittest that even in the bosom of thy Church man should appear with his passions, his errors, and his defects; yet beneath this visible humanity, I confess thy presence and adore thee; thy breath it is that quickens it, thy light that guides it, thy hand that sustains and protects it. Of men it is composed, by men it is governed: these are, however, the instruments of thy providential designs. Thy action, hidden in theirs, accomplishes her mission in the world, leading her through the different phases of her existence to her glorious destiny.

My God, it is from this supernatural point of view that I wish henceforth to study the

¹ HEB. 13⁸

history of thy Church. I will study it, not to satisfy a vain curiosity, but to know thee better in this manifestation of thy life. Thee will I see in all its vicissitudes and this thought will direct me therein, it will guide me in my judgments, and will afford me a source of edification as well as instruction.

I resolve:

1. To seek in the study of Church history the hidden life of Christ;
2. To continue it when I shall have entered the priesthood.

*Jesus Christ, yesterday, and to-day; and the same for ever.*¹

¹ HEB. 13⁸

XXI

LITURGY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore God the inspirer of the sacred ceremonies. We will recall that many saintly bishops and priests have made the liturgy a special object of their solicitude.

II. We will consider three reasons that should make us honor and study the sacred ceremonies.

1. *The authority of the Church*, whose laws impose a stricter obligation upon a priest than upon the faithful. We owe great respect to the ceremonies because of their venerable antiquity, because they apply directly to the worship of God and because of their intimate connection with the dogmas of our faith.

2. *The mysteries symbolized by the liturgy*. In the mind of the Church all the ceremonies are symbolic. Christ is the first and central object of this symbolism. Then there is the Church pursuing her pilgrimage towards heaven which, in turn the ceremonies set forth as a constant source of joy and hope.

3. *The effects which the ceremonies are destined to produce in men's souls*. It is needful that the Church speak to our senses by an external rite able to strike the imagination. Indeed, the cere-

monies form a popular sermon, arousing the spirit of devotion and sustaining the attention of the faithful

III. We will see how great an esteem we should have for the ceremonies of the Church. Hence our obligation to study them and to perform them with punctuality and precision. We will ask our Savior to bestow upon us more and more the spirit of religion that we may avoid any remissness in the ceremonies of the altar.

We will resolve:

1. To study the rules of the liturgy, especially concerning any function that we may be about to perform;

2. Frequently to recall that, in the sanctuary we are the representatives of Christ and the Church.

Every priest taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God.

Let them help the observances of the tabernacle of the covenant and the ceremonies of the sanctuary.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God, the author and inspirer of the sacred ceremonies. It was he who, in earliest times, made known to the patriarchs how he wished to be honored, who determined the rites of the sacrifices offered by Abel, Seth, and Henoah before the deluge, by Noah, Abraham, Melchisedech, Isaac and Jacob in the subsequent period. Later, when he gave a

law to his people by the ministry of Moses, he took care to regulate the levitical ceremonies even in their details.

Nor can we doubt that he has likewise assisted the Church in establishing the liturgy of the New Law which replaced the earlier form of worship and excelled it as reality excels the foreshadowing that represents it, as truth surpasses figure.

Let us adore also the Holy Ghost who inspires priests of the Church with a profound veneration and love for the sacred ceremonies. Respect for the liturgy and fidelity in observing it has ever been a trait of good priests. Illustrious popes and bishops have made it the special object of their solicitude. In the East, St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom; in the West, St. Gregory, St. Pius V, St. Charles, and St. Francis de Sales used every means to give the ceremonies of the Church all the splendor and beauty of which they are capable. Among priests, too, what examples we have of respect for the sacred liturgy in the lives of St. Philip Neri, St. Vincent de Paul, and many others who not only showed themselves faithful observers of the liturgical prescriptions but also strongly recommended their study and practice to their followers.

Called, as we are, to the high honor of being ministers of the sacred liturgy, of performing the venerable rites of Holy Church, let us keep in mind these admirable examples and let us ask our Savior to give us, in this meditation, the grace of increased respect for the liturgy and a sincere desire to practice it faithfully.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider three reasons that should make us honor and study the ceremonies of the liturgy: the authority of the Church, the august mysteries which they symbolize, and the effects which they are destined to produce in men's souls.

1. *The authority of the Church.* All the faithful owe respectful obedience to whatever the Church prescribes. But priests have a stricter obligation to do so since, by their ordination, they have contracted a solemn engagement of special submission to Holy Church whose servants and ministers they are: *Oportebit. . . in Ecclesiæ ministerio semper esses mancipatos.*¹ Among the laws that make up the discipline of the Church, there are none more

¹ PONT. ROM. *in Ord. Subd.*

venerable and more sacred than those regarding the liturgy.

Many of the ceremonies owe their origin to pre-Christian times and are found in the Mosaic liturgy which was prescribed by God himself. Others go back to apostolic times and are contemporary with the founding of the Church. Such, for example, are the principal ceremonies of the holy sacrifice. Others were established in the centuries that followed the period of persecution, when the Church of Christ, free at last and victorious over the pagan empire, was able to give its worship a worthy splendor and magnificence.

The liturgy is venerable likewise because of its object. Other laws of the Church regulate customs, legal judgments, the sanctity of marriage, the government of souls; these, however, apply directly to the worship of God, to the loftiest, most august, and holiest acts performed by man on earth.

We should respect the ceremonies also because of their intimate connection with the dogmas of our faith, for the liturgy is a living tradition: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. It is like a creed visibly performed, a profession of faith by which the Church continually proclaims her belief.

This importance of the ritual in the mind of the Church is evident from her great care to fix even its small details. Popes and councils have ever been solicitous about the liturgy and piously attentive to regulate the order of the divine offices and to remove whatever would alter the severe beauty, compromise the symbolism, or destroy the harmony of the sacred ceremonies.

In order that this deposit of liturgical tradition, bequeathed to us by a venerable antiquity, should be preserved pure and intact, the Roman Pontiffs have established a special congregation of cardinals and prelates particularly well versed in the study of the liturgy, whose duty it is to safeguard the ancient practices, to prevent and correct abuses that may be introduced, and to solve the difficulties that sometimes arise in applying the rules of the ritual.

2. *The mysteries symbolized by the liturgy.* Whatever may have been the reasons which, in the beginning, led the Church to institute the ceremonial practices that we have to-day it is beyond doubt, seeing her care in their observance, that in her mind they are all mysterious and symbolic. We ought to see in them a living representation, a sort of incar-

nation, so to speak, by means of which the holiest things in religion become visible and palpable.

The first and principal object of this symbolism is Christ himself, the centre of all our religious practices. In the liturgy, everything relates to him, more or less directly; everything recalls his adorable person and his double nature, the mysteries of his life and death, the worship that he pays to God, the outpouring of his grace by which he purifies men's souls and associates them in his acts of worship.

The second object of the liturgical symbolism is the Church, the beloved spouse of Christ, exiled on earth, but pursuing her pilgrimage in this vale of tears to her abiding home. From the midst of earthly struggle she turns her eyes and raises her heart to Christ, reigning in heaven; him she addresses in her anguish with ardent supplication. Her entire liturgy is a living, pathetic expression of her interior sighs.

A third object of the liturgy is heaven, the blessed goal that is a constant source of joy and confidence for the Church. In all her solemnities, the Church raises our thoughts to heaven, arouses our desire to obtain that eter-

nal reward, to work for it, and to regard the things of earth as means to that end. But in her ceremonies, she does more than recall heaven to our minds; she presents to us a reflection of heaven's magnificence. What sight have we ever beheld on earth that offered a better idea of heaven's splendor than some of the liturgical ceremonies properly performed? Who of us has not, at times, been transported by these functions to hear the angelic choirs and see the splendor of the city of God?

It is recorded that the first Christian king of the Franks was so filled with admiration at the sight of the church magnificently decorated for the occasion of his baptism, the sacred ministers chanting the psalms, and all the sacred ceremonies, that he asked of St. Remigius: "Is this the kingdom of God of which you have made promise?" "No," replied the bishop, "this is only the symbol."

We find this symbolic expression, for example: in the church where the faithful assemble for prayer, the majesty and proportions of which suggest the house of God; the altar of sacrifice, surmounted by the cross; the sacred vessels and the sacerdotal vestments; the candles spreading their mysterious light in the

holy place, symbol of Jesus, the light of the world; the incense rising towards heaven; the bells, at times joyous, at times sad, calling the faithful to church and inviting them to prayer; the actions of the sacred ministers, their postures, the liturgical words and chant.

3. *The effects which the ceremonies are destined to produce in men's souls.* The Church, appreciating human nature so thoroughly, has understood that it would not suffice that religion speak to our mind and to our heart by its doctrine and morals; but that it must also speak to our senses by an external rite able to strike the imagination. This she accomplishes by the sacred ceremonies. And surely everyday experience shows that her efforts have been most fruitful

The ceremonies do, indeed, form a popular sermon within reach of all. Capable of moving the most intellectual, it is also understood by the humblest. Often the teachings and exhortations of the liturgy, seen by the eye, prove more powerful than words heard by the ear.

Then, too, the liturgy is a means of sustaining the attention of the faithful while they are performing their religious duties. And their very variety enables the faithful to assist even at long functions without distraction or fatigue.

But it is especially by arousing the spirit of devotion that the sacred ceremonies exercise a salutary influence on the souls of those assisting. While following the liturgical rites of the solemn feasts, are we not transported above present realities, brought face to face with eternity, so to speak, in contact with God? There is a majestic grandeur, a solemn dignity about the ceremonies of the altar, making us feel that we are at the very gate of heaven and that we have caught a glimpse of the divine presence.

The Church has acted most wisely in joining an imposing ceremonial to the religious duties prescribed for the faithful. In this she has followed the universal tradition of all peoples. And Protestantism, which, at its birth, rejected the use of liturgical rites, has begun to recognize that the coldness of its religious service does not accord with the needs of our human nature.

It becomes evident, therefore, that the religious ceremonies of the Church deserve the attention of our priestly zeal. Since we are ordained to save men's souls, we should take advantage of this excellent means of leading them to God. But the ceremonies will not

be unto edification unless we perform them with religious respect and dignity.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The considerations upon which I have just meditated clearly show me that I ought to have a high esteem for the ceremonies of the Church. As a simple layman I would be held to this. With how much greater reason, therefore, should I who am chosen to take part in the sacred functions?

To be well acquainted with the ceremonies, I must study them. The Church appoints me to perform them. Among the duties of a priest, the first is the public worship of God. Hence ingorance of the sacred ceremonies would be inexcusable.

I should cultivate the habit of most exact punctuality for all the public functions of the Church and painstaking precision in performing them. This duty is imposed upon me by the prescriptions of the Church, by the honor due to God in their fulfillment, by respect for Christ, and by considerateness for the convenience and edification of the faithful. There is a correct way to make rubrical bows, signs

of the cross, genuflections, and so forth. All should be done in a dignified manner and without haste.

My God, have I not reason to reproach myself for much neglect and carelessness in the matter of ceremonies? Have I faithfully observed all the prescriptions of the rubrics? Has the spirit of routine, the lack of reflection, the desire to cut them short, deprived the ceremonies in which I have taken part of their becoming solemnity?

My Savior, in order to avoid these defects, I ask thee to bestow upon me ever more and more the spirit of religion. In the sanctuary I am thy representative. May I be interiorly moved by the dispositions that animate thee and in all that is external may I be a faithful expression of that modesty and respect which thou dost wish to have manifested in the exercise of prayer.

I resolve:

1. To study the rules of the liturgy, especially concerning any function that I may be about to perform;

2. Frequently to recall that, in the sanctuary I am the representative of Christ and the Church.

Every priest taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God.¹

Let them keep the observances of the tabernacle of the covenant, and the ceremonies of the sanctuary.²

¹ HEB. 5¹

² PARAL. 23¹²

XXII

ECCLESIASTICAL CHANT

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the Holy Spirit enlightening the Church and making her productive in all works. We will thank our Lord for having enriched the Church, by the instrumentality of Pope St. Gregory with a chant that corresponds so well to the majesty of her religious mysteries.

II. We will consider the liturgical chant as the voice of the Church, also its beauty, and the effects which it produces in men's souls.

1. *The voice of the Church.* The music of the Church is the expression of her thoughts and religious sentiments towards God and the saints.

2. *The beauty of the chant.* Its profoundly religious character makes it different from ordinary music. We find therein a most touching expression of Christian sentiments especially of faith, hope, and love. And the Church has artfully introduced a variety according to seasons and solemnities.

3. *The effect which the chant produces in men's souls.* It is a sort of sermon, an exhortation that appeals to our heart, disposing us to practice penance and giving us a Christian courage in the pursuit of virtue.

III. We will recall that we are set up as interpreters of the Church's music. Hence we will acknowledge the obligation to acquaint ourselves with the proper way to chant those parts which we will have to sing.

We will resolve to take all requisite pains in the serious study of ecclesiastical chant.

My lips shall greatly rejoice, when I shall sing to thee.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the Holy Spirit enlightening, guiding, sanctifying the Church and making her productive in all good works. He it is who preserves her teaching from error, who maintains the purity of her discipline, and, in a certain sense, inspires the liturgy and the sacred music.

In the Old Testament we see the fruit of his inspiration in the royal prophet's wonderful canticles which were the ornament of the great Jewish feast days and which, after so many centuries, still arouse our enthusiastic admiration.

In later times God raised the illustrious Pope St. Gregory to be the reformer of sacred music. This holy Pontiff enriched the ecclesiastical chant with many new melodies and it came to be called Gregorian chant. We may, there-

fore, say of St. Gregory what Holy Writ records in praise of David: *He set singers before the altar, and by their voices he made sweet melody. And to the festivals he added beauty, and set in order the solemn times even to the end of his life, that they should praise the holy name of the Lord, and magnify the holiness of God.*¹

Does not this great doctor of the Church offer us in his own person an example worthy of imitation? Although great cares demanded his attention, although occupied with legislation for the Church in the East and with the conversion of the West to the faith, yet he found leisure to compose sacred chants and to teach some boys how to sing them correctly and religiously. This should show a priest the esteem that he ought to have for the church music and the zeal that he ought to exercise in attending to it.

Let us thank our Lord for having enriched the Church, by the instrumentality of this holy Pope, with a chant that corresponds so well by its gravity, sweetness, and beauty to the majesty of her religious mysteries. Let us also admire in St. Gregory the priestly spirit, exhibiting so great a love for the worship of

¹ ECCLI. 47¹¹⁻¹²

God. And since we are, by virtue of our sacerdotal office, the depositaries and interpreters of the liturgical chant, let us ask of God, by his intercession, the grace to understand it better and better.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider the liturgical chant as the voice of the Church, also its beauty and the effects which it produces in men's souls.

1. *The chant is the voice of the Church.* Of all the modes of manifesting the sentiments of the heart, music is unquestionably the most expressive, the deepest, and the most pathetic. It is in sacred music that we hear the prayerful voice of the Church. Not only has she adopted it, given it a prominent place in her liturgical books, and ordered its use in the ceremonies of the altar, but it is she who inspired it; it is her spirit, her breath, her life that gave it birth. This chant is truly the echo of her soul, the expression of her thoughts and religious sentiments towards God and his divine Son, towards the Blessed Virgin, the angels, and the saints.

In the course of the ages there have been great popes like St. Gregory, illustrious bishops like St. Ambrose, pious monks like St. Bernard,

sometimes humble priests and even fervent laymen who, after meditating upon the mysteries of the Incarnation before their crucifix, or upon the greatness of the Mother of our Savior or the glory of the saints, have felt themselves transported, as it were, by an inspired enthusiasm. They felt the need of expressing outwardly what they experienced in their soul, and this they best accomplished in song; their soul poured forth in hymns and canticles a sublime though imperfect expression of what God said to them in secret. From their lips the Church has received these sacred songs and she wishes that they should be repeated through century after century as the ornament of her religious solemnities.

2. *The beauty of the liturgical chant.* That which first strikes us in the chant of the Church, so different from ordinary music, is the profoundly religious character which pervades it all. It is so solemn, sweet, simple, calm, and serene, with an accent that seems to belong not to earth but, as St. Gregory Nazianzen said, to be rather the prelude of heavenly glory.

All the sentiments inspired by the spirit of Christian piety find a most touching expression in sacred music. There are adoration, thanksgiving, prayer, contrition, pity, humility, joy. Above all it expresses the three great virtues

of the supernatural life: faith, hope, and love. With what firmness, majestic calm, noble and vigorous solemnity it appeals to our ears as the act of a Christian fearlessly testifying his faith? Who has not heard at times the accents of Christian hope, mingling in soothing melody the sadness of our exile, the desire for our true fatherland, and the trustful prayer imploring pardon for the past and grace for the future? More expressive still is the music of love, rising at times into ecstasy that gives us a momentary sensation of heavenly joy.

With what knowing art the Church has introduced this variety according to seasons and solemnities. The joy aroused in the soul by the music of Christmas has a character different from that which the triumphal melodies of Easter-tide and Corpus Christi produce. And the sweet, penetrating prayers of Pentecost have not the same accent as those with which, in Advent, we sigh for the coming of the Messias. When the Church prays for her departed children, there is in her sacred chant the impression of God's terrible judgments. Who has not noticed in the Church's Lenten music the beautiful expression of sadness, now repentant, now compassionate, that so well befits that season of penance and so powerfully calls to mind the passion of our Savior?

3. *The effects which the chant produces in men's souls.* Let us hear the words of St. Augustine: *Thy hymns and canticles, O Lord, brought tears to my eyes and I was deeply moved at hearing the sweet accent of the voice of thy Church. Its sound fell upon my ears infusing thy truth into my heart and producing within me a feeling of great piety and devotion.*¹ Who among us has not experienced impressions like those of St. Augustine, feeling more devout, more fervent, more attracted by divine love while listening to the voice of the Church?

It is a sort of sermon, sometimes powerfully eloquent, an exhortation that appeals to our heart, making us forget things of earth for the moment, raising us to God, as it were, making us long for heaven, disposing us to practice penance for our sins, inspiring us with the resolve and the courage to become more holy.

The psalmody of the Church, says St. Isidore, *consoles our heart in its sorrow, expels weariness, arouses us from sloth, and urges us to repent of our sins.*² In the words of another saint, *the chant of the Church, at the same time that it delights the soul, also stimulates the ardent desire for that which it exalts. It subdues concupiscence*

¹ CONFESS., 7

² SENT., 1

*and the evil inclinations of the flesh; it drives away bad thoughts; it bestows upon the soul a rich harvest of spiritual fruit; it augments our generosity and courage; and supplies a salutary remedy against the afflictions that we encounter on the way of life.*¹

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Thou dost call me, O Lord, not only to hear the chant of thy Church but also to be its interpreter. It forms a part of the liturgy in the public offices of our holy religion. Therefore, as I am obliged to study the sacred ceremonies, so too should I acquaint myself with the proper way to chant those parts which I myself will have to sing. The manner in which I fulfill this duty will become a source of edification or disedification to many. The chant of the Church possesses a noble gravity and solemnity to which the interpretation on the part of the priest should correspond.

I resolve to take all requisite pains in the serious study of ecclesiastical chant.

*My lips shall greatly rejoice, when I shall sing to thee.*²

¹ ST. JUSTINIAN: *Resp. ad quaest.* 107

² PS. 70²³

XXIII

MEALS

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our blessed Lord and reflect upon the perfect dispositions of his soul at his daily repasts. We will recall the many accounts which the gospel narrative gives us of his meals; especially contemplating him at the last supper, when he instituted the Holy Eucharist.
- II. That we may enter into the supernatural dispositions with which we should take our meals, we will consider:

1. *The repast as first instituted.* The law which imposes upon us the necessity of eating is truly a holy institution: teaching us that we are not masters of our own life, symbolizing grace and heavenly glory, and permitting the irrational things of creation, in us and by us who consume them, to pay honor to God.

2. *The effect of original sin,* which, for the most part, has made of this priestly function of eating a commonplace act, often the source of shameful excess. For some, eating is an occasion to satisfy a bodily need, for others it is the mere gratification of their appetite. But the sin of excess is still more deplorable.

3. *The Christian repast* should be preceded by prayer, performed in a spirit of sacrifice, and concluded by thanksgiving.

III. We will regret the defects of which we are conscious in the matter of our repasts. We will ask for the grace of moderation and self-denial at meals.

We will resolve:

1. To recite the prayers before and meals with attention and devotion;

2. At each meal to practice some privation out of love for God.

Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our blessed Lord and reflect upon the perfect dispositions of his soul at his daily repasts. Having assumed our nature, he willed to be like us in all things, save only what was incompatible with the dignity of his person. To sustain his life, therefore, he had recourse to food and drink. The gospel narrative gives us no details of his daily life at Nazareth with Mary and Joseph. But the sacred writers have recorded some instances of our Savior's meals: there was the one which the angels prepared for him after his forty days' fast in the desert; the banquet at Cana, where he performed his first miracle; meals that

he took at the houses of Pharisees, of St. Matthew the publican who had become his disciple, of St. Peter's mother-in-law after he had miraculously cured her, in the home of Lazarus, at the inn of Emmaus after his resurrection, and also in the upper room in Jerusalem.

While setting forth these particulars of Christ's life, the evangelists have not failed to show us how the Savior, when at table, elevated and sanctified the commonplace action of eating by imparting his divine teaching, joining to the natural nourishment of the body, spiritual food for the soul; thus showing his disciples how they ought to sanctify and supernaturalize their meal.

There is one occasion that stands out prominently before all other repasts recorded in our Savior's life, and this deserves more particular attention. It is the memorable last supper, at which, after partaking of the Paschal lamb according to the rite of the Jewish law, he gave himself as spiritual nourishment to his apostles, instituting the Eucharistic banquet wherein the bread of angels becomes the food of men's souls.

It was, then, in the course of the last supper before his crucifixion and death, that he left us this precious testimonial of his love. Has

he not, by choosing that occasion for so solemn an act, let us know the sanctity that belongs to our daily repasts and our refectories? With what dignity, reserve, and modesty we should behave there! This thought it is that has inspired the Church to employ such beautiful prayers before and after meals.

Let us testify to our divine Master our great need of his holy teaching. And let us ask him to give us the spirit of St. John Chrysostom's recommendation: *In the presence of the Maker should we eat; with Christ in our midst at table.*¹

II. CONSIDERATIONS

In order to enter into the supernatural dispositions with which we should take our meals, let us consider them as first instituted, as affected by original sin, and as sanctified by Christian practices.

1. *The repast as first instituted.* Seen in the primitive plan of the Creator and freed from the imperfections that degrade it, the law which imposes upon us the necessity of eating is truly a holy institution, holy in its teachings, its symbolism, and in its very nature.

¹ ST. CHRYS. XVI in *Matth.*

What this law teaches us. Does it not show that man is not the master of his own life? Human life is like a burning torch in constant danger of going out, a flame in ceaseless need of fuel. It is God who lighted it and he it is who keeps it burning by means of material creatures that serve us for nourishment to which he gives the power of sustaining our life. Our need of daily food should, therefore, make us remember that our life comes from God, that it belongs to him, and that it is in his power to take it from us.

The repast as symbolic. In the first place it represents grace, that higher life which incorporates us with Christ and, so to speak, transforms us into him, as bodily nourishment is assimilated to our physical substance. To make this symbolism still more palpable, God has willed that the supernatural life should be principally increased in us by receiving a mystical bread which is none other than the very body of our Savior.

In the second place the repast symbolizes eternal glory, the consummation of the life of grace. It is worthy of remark that in Holy Writ the figure most frequently employed to characterize the joys of heaven and the unspeakable communication of God's infinite

blessedness to the elect is the image of a banquet at which the saints are gathered about the heavenly table. The Church recalls the thought in the prayer prescribed for the blessing of the table. *Mensæ cælestis participes faciat nos. . . . Ad cœnam vitæ æternæ perducat nos rex æternæ gloriæ.*

The very nature of this act of eating is to assimilate to our own being those created things which we consume. The whole world was made for God's greater honor and glory but it is only man who on earth, by the knowledge and love of his maker, can attain this end directly. By this process of assimilation, however, he can raise to the dignity of his personal life these created things of a lower order: whence they can glorify God in him and by him. *Magnificate Dominum mecum*, says the Church in the thanksgiving after meals, *et exaltemus nomen ejus in idipsum.*

2. *The effect of original sin.* The act of taking our daily meals, worthy and noble in the beginning, has felt the depraving effects of original sin which has, indeed, influenced all our relations with the exterior creation. Consequently what ought to be a priestly action on the part of man in the name of the irrational creation has, for the most part, become a com-

monplace act, often the source of shameful excesses.

For a great number of men, mealtime is merely an occasion to satisfy a bodily need. They take their food almost like the animal takes his, to appease their hunger but without any higher motive suggested by faith or even by philosophical reason. Thinking neither of God who bestows our food upon us and gives it the power to nourish us nor of the motives by which we should be prompted, they deprive their repast of its Christian character. This is, of course, something omitted rather than something evil positively willed. To wish, in taking food, to satisfy a need of our physical nature is in itself not at all blameworthy. But this purpose should be placed in relation with a higher end.

There are those who seek at their meals not the nourishment needful for the body but the mere gratification of their appetite. To render easier and more sure the acts necessary for the conservation of our life, God has attached to them a satisfaction more or less keen which makes us perform them with pleasure. This is very true of eating. For our first parents, before the fall, it was not an end in itself but a means that contributed to draw their souls more strongly and energetically to God.

But since sin entered the world, this pleasure has become a snare for us. We easily make of the means an end that we seek for the mere delight and gratification that it affords. Let us but call to mind that some there are so given up to a life of the senses that they seek the table only for the pleasure it gives them; who are at great pains to make their pleasure the keenest and most delicate possible; who seem to find their all and only happiness in the sordid gratification of eating and drinking. But how many others, without going to that excess, know not how to free themselves from immoderate attachment to the things of the table? Against this we must exercise constant vigilance over ourselves.

The sin of excess is still more shameful. The very brutes stop eating and drinking when they have satisfied the demands of hunger and thirst. Not so the intemperate man. Not confining himself to the limits set by nature's needs but rather seeking to gratify the sensual inclination to which he is enslaved, he diverts to the ruin of his health those very means provided to sustain his life. He will even surrender his God-given reason to the bestial idol of intemperance.

3. *The Christian repast.* To have the char-

acter of a truly Christian work it should be preceded by prayer, performed in a spirit of sacrifice, and concluded by thanksgiving.

Prayer is the becoming prelude of every Christian act. Especially in the matter of eating is our nature prone to be impetuous and inordinate. Excess easily creeps in. How fitting it is, therefore, at the beginning of a meal to direct our heart towards God by prayer. It elevates our thoughts, purifies our intentions, and moderates the impetuosity of our sensual nature. The blessing of God which we invoke upon ourselves produces a double effect. For it confers upon us the grace of eating our meal in a holy, Christian manner; and it averts to some degree, the dangerous snare ever present when we are using the things of God's material creation. For those in community life the Church prescribes most appropriate prayers to be recited before meals, well calculated to make us enter into those sentiments and dispositions which a Christian should have at table.

A spirit of sacrifice should characterize a Christian meal. It is salutary not only that we be watchful against excess but also that we free ourselves as much as possible from every inordinate attachment to the gratification of

the senses. But, as it is so easy to go beyond just limits, experience shows us that it is important to remain at a distance on the safe side, deprive ourselves even of what might be permitted without sin. Every privation that we impose on ourselves at table is, so to speak, a sacrifice offered to God and a victory gained over our sensual appetite.

By thanksgiving we ought to conclude our meals. Our food is a gift from the hand of God. *Aperis tu manum tuam, et imples omne animal benedictione.* Hence the just and becoming practice of returning thanks to divine Providence after each repast. Would it not be unchristian to leave the table without raising our thoughts to the Father of infinite mercies to offer him a grateful homage of our renewed powers, and to promise that we will use them for his greater honor and glory? If, in spite of watchful care, some remissness has entered into our repast, the prayer of thanksgiving will purify our soul of the slight stains thereof.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, if, sustained by thy grace, I have not had to reproach myself with great sinfulness in excess at meals, have I not perhaps

performed these daily acts in a manner less perfect than I should? Have I, at times, passed the strict limits of moderation? Have I neglected to direct my intention so as to make my act supernatural?

The defects of which I accuse myself, dear Lord, make me feel the need of thy grace. To expiate my acts of excessive indulgence at table, thou hast willed to drink gall and vinegar on the cross. Grant that I may be moved by this example to impose on myself or at least accept more generously the privations which occasion offers. Thou perceivest how my soul is inclined towards whatever flatters the senses. Physical pleasure attracts me in spite of myself. Clothe me, my Savior, with thy divine strength so that, though I lack the courage to practice the heroic mortifications of the saints I may at least be faithful to repress those sensual tendencies that have become like second nature in me. They manifest themselves and are to be feared especially at the table. Consequently there will I exercise a more severe watchfulness over myself.

I resolve:

1. To recite the prayers before and after meals with attention and devotion;

2. At each meal to practice some privation out of love for God.

Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God.¹

¹ I COR. 10³¹

XXIV

RECREATION

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord permitting that we devote certain periods to relaxation after our studies. We will honor those recreations which our Savior himself willed to take during his mortal life. We will ask for the grace to make of our recreations, as did the saints of God, a means of sanctification.

II. We will consider:

1. *The intentions that we should have at recreation.* They should be supernatural. For recreation is a duty to be fulfilled in the spirit of obedience. By its means we should seek to renew our powers of body and mind so as to devote ourselves more perfectly to piety and study. It ought also to strengthen the bonds of fraternal charity that unite us all in the family of our community life.

2. *The dangers to be avoided.* We are exposed to dissipation of mind and the drying up of our heart against impressions of piety. It is above all at recreation that we offend truth and charity by sins of the tongue.

3. *The virtues to be practiced.* Charity, zeal for religion, and humility are three virtues most important in the formation of our priestly character and for the success of our future ministry. Recre-

ation offers us numerous opportunities for their practice.

III. Recalling the words of St. Paul: *that to them that love God, all things work together unto good*, we will acknowledge how especially it is true of the elements that make up our seminary life. We will ask ourselves whether we have derived from recreation all the good that we should and whether we have made it an occasion for the generous practice of virtue. We will ask pardon for our neglect and God's grace for fidelity to the following resolutions:

1. At the beginning of each recreation to recollect ourselves in order to form the supernatural intentions that we ought to have;

2. To make greater effort to cultivate the virtues of religion, charity, and humility at recreation;

3. At the evening examination of conscience to take particular account of the way we have spent our recreations.

The man of interior life soon recollecteth himself, because he never wholly poureth forth himself upon exterior things.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord in the mercy and goodness which he testifies in permitting, even directing, that we devote certain periods to relaxation after our studies. By our sins we have deserved unremitting toil. What a large number of men there are in the world whose work is not relieved by periods of recreation

and who, to earn their daily bread, are obliged from morning till night to keep their hand to the plow! But God has willed that our work should not confine us so rigorously. Each day he says to us as he did to the apostles: *Come apart. . . . and rest a little.*¹ And once each week we are allowed to enjoy a longer relaxation from our regular occupations.

Let us likewise honor the periods of recreation that our Savior himself willed to take during his mortal life, submitting himself to the weakness of our nature. During his childhood he took his recreation under the eyes of Mary and Joseph who beheld the astounding spectacle of the Word incarnate humbling his divine majesty even to the amusements of human infancy. In the course of his public ministry also he was wont to relax in those meetings with his apostles and disciples, talking to them and hearing them with the goodness of a father and the intimacy of a friend. My Savior, in these apparently commonplace details of thy human life thou wast pleasing to the divine Trinity, thou wast adored by the angels no less than in thy most wonderful works. So, too, thou art no less worthy of

¹ ST. MARK 6³¹

our respectful homage. Blessed be thou for having willed by this example to teach us that we can please God in truly Christian recreation as in all the rest, and for having merited for us the grace thereof.

The lives of the greatest saints show us that they likewise were wont to relax their austerity in order to take some recreation after work. The account of St. John the Apostle amusing himself with a partridge is a celebrated instance in early Christian history. Let us ask of God the grace to imitate them in our recreations and, after their example, to make thereof a means of sanctification.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider the intentions that we should have at recreation, the dangers that are to be encountered, and the virtues that we can practice.

1. *The intentions that we should have at recreation.* They should, of course, be pure and supernatural. Undisciplined souls, following the instincts of nature, see in recreation only the pleasure that it affords and are moved by this motive alone. Quite otherwise must be the attitude of a seminarian or priest, directed and inspired by faith.

For him, recreation is in the first place a duty which he fulfills in the same spirit of obedience as the other obligations imposed by the rule. It is really the expression of God's holy will in his regard. The rule summons him to prayer, to study, to meals, and he goes. In the same spirit does he go to recreation. Therein he sees the providential order prescribing how he should employ each day, determining that series of exercises into which his time is divided. If on some occasions he finds that recreation would not be agreeable to his disposition at the time, if he feels more inclined to separate himself from his fellows and retire to his room, nevertheless he will seek rather to please God whose will it is that he take the recreation. Thus prompted by supernatural motives, the relaxation of recreation can become as sanctifying and meritorious as the best prayer. We are familiar with the story of the saintly novice who was asked what he would do if, in the course of recreation, it should be revealed to him that he was about to die. "I would continue," he said, "the exercise which the rule imposes on me, happy to die in the practice of obedience."

It is not forbidden to propose to ourselves by way of intention the bodily and mental

relaxation for which our recreation has been established. This is indeed its direct end, good and thoroughly legitimate. But it is related to a higher purpose. By renewing our powers, it gives us the means of devoting ourselves more perfectly to the exercises of piety and study which are themselves the essential condition of the accomplishment of God's designs in our regard. Such is the further end for which the recreation is permitted us; such is, therefore, the intention that we ought to have ourselves.

In community life there is another purpose accomplished by recreation, as important as it is praiseworthy; it helps to strengthen the bonds of fraternal charity that ought to unite all the members of a religious family. All the community exercises, prayer, meals, classes, offer an expression of this charity; but it is particularly in recreation that it may expand to its full extent. For there we see one another, speak to one another, learn to know one another; there is formed that solidarity which makes of the community not merely a collection of individuals but a family of brothers. Let us deliberately and faithfully set this noble purpose before ourselves at recreation, to contribute as best we can to this fraternal spirit in the seminary.

2. *Dangers.* First of all we are exposed to dissipation of mind. For successful study as well as for progress in the life of prayer, a most essential condition is recollection. This fundamental disposition which our seminary life purposes to develop in us and without which we can become neither learned nor holy, is especially threatened at times of recreation. By our very nature and by reason of the spirit of relaxation that presides at our informal conversations, we are less apt to enter into ourselves and reflect. How much more true this will be of one who is not watchful over himself, who, to to speak, loses hold on himself during recreation.

From this danger flows another, the drying up of our heart so that it becomes less subject to the impressions of piety. Let us consult experience. At the outset of the day we made a good meditation and assisted at mass devoutly. The unction of God's grace penetrated our soul and we were aware of the divine presence. We passed the morning in an encouraging atmosphere of piety that rendered our union with God pleasant and easy.

Up to the time of recreation we have remained well recollected. But when that hour

comes we yield totally to the joy and satisfaction procured by conversation or whatsoever form our recreation assumes. The consciousness of God's presence is not so keen as it was; it does not seem so real to us. It requires a great effort on our part to let God's grace enter our soul. If there is some religious exercise to be performed, we feel almost powerless to enter heartily into the spirit of it. Although our love for God has not diminished, it no longer gives us the same consolation.

It is above all in recreation that we are exposed to commit innumerable sins of the tongue so forcibly condemned by the Apostle St. James: *The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity*,¹ falsehoods, exaggerations, criticism, bitter raillery, the boastfulness of vain glory. The freedom of speech and lack of reserve that we permit ourselves in conversation lead us to commit many faults against charity, truthfulness, and humility.

The saints feared these dangers of recreation and hence many of them sought to separate themselves as much as possible from intercourse with their fellow-men. In the *Imitation* we read: *The greatest saints shunned the*

¹ ST. JAMES 3^d

*company of men when they could, and chose rather to live unto God in secret.*¹ But our Lord, in bestowing upon us a vocation to the priestly ministry, has called us to a life that must be passed in the midst of our fellow-men. And this very intercourse is destined to be one of our most effective means of bringing souls to God. It is, therefore, evident that we must face the dangers of recreation, and this by a watchful practice of self-restraint and moderation.

3. *Virtues to practice.* Recreation offers us numerous occasions to practice virtues that will be most important to us in the sacred ministry. It should constitute a notable element in the formation of our priestly character. Although, for the sake of serious study and our more perfect spiritual training, we are effectively segregated from the world during our years in the seminary, yet this life of preparation must ever keep in view the sacred ministry to which it leads us, a life-long service in the Lord's vineyard of immortal souls, therefore a ministry among men and not a life of solitude and self-sanctification. Our great duty will be to save men's souls. In our consequent

¹ IMIT. I: 20

intercourse with them, we will find an opportunity to practice three priestly virtues of the utmost importance, charity, zeal for religion, and humility, which, before the time of our ordination, should have become practical, habitual traits of our character. Where, in the seminary life, are we to find opportunity for the cultivation of these virtues? Principally at recreation; for that is the time when these virtues are most severely tried, the time of social intercourse with our fellow-seminarians.

Charity is wounded by the spreading of calumnious rumors, by a spirit of criticism, by bitter raillery, by sarcastic thrusts. It requires from us that we manifest a spirit of sympathy, interest, and benevolence to our brethren, encouraging the timid, consoling the sad, seeking to converse about those things which will be pleasing and interesting to our hearers, giving attention and appreciation to whatever they may say.

Zeal for religion. No doubt it would be indiscreet to transform recreation into a series of pious discourses. Nevertheless, if the love of God animates us, if we are really men of God, we will learn always to assume the point of view of religion and the welfare of souls. As priests, we should regard contact with our

fellow-men as a powerful means of leading them to God. Yet we will fail to do this without zeal for the interests of religion.

For the practice of *humility*, recreation offers us innumerable occasions. I am inclined to put myself forward, to speak of myself and my accomplishments, to manifest my knowledge and talents. But from the depth of my heart I will offer to God the sacrifice of this longing and satisfaction. Perhaps I have acquired some little success in the course of a conversation, it may be by a clever remark, a repartee, a triumph in a discussion, some bit of wit or a good story; and this has called forth admiring applause. But I will renounce the vain-glorious gratification which might flatter my self-love. If, on the contrary, I encounter some humiliations, sarcastic attacks, ridicule, I will accept these without bitterness or murmuring and will suppress any unworthy or uncharitable sentiments that may arise in my heart.

Not a single recreation should pass without my offering to God some acts of these virtues, the more meritorious as they are the less apparent. God alone sees them. Nor need I fear that the practice of these virtues will be prompted by self-love, which often destroys the merit of otherwise good works.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Recalling the words of St. Paul: *that to them that love God, all things work together unto good*,¹ we will appreciate how especially this is true of the elements that make up the life of a seminarian. All are the expression of God's holy will in my regard, all can contribute to my growth in holiness. Sleep, meals, even recreations are no exception to this rule.

But have I been practically convinced of this important truth? Have I derived from recreation all the good that I could have found therein? Have I always sanctified it by supernatural intentions? Have I habitually taken forethought of the dangers to be encountered at these periods of relaxation? And is it not true that at my examination of conscience each evening I have found that the greater number of my faults were committed during recreation.

But has it been an occasion for the generous practice of virtue, or must I acknowledge that I have scarcely learned how to profit by the numerous opportunities which recreation offers for perfecting myself? With watchfulness and application I might have saved it from spirit-

¹ ROM. 8²⁸

ual barrenness and made it fruitful in good works.

My God, pardon my neglect and by thy grace make me faithful to these resolutions:

1. At the beginning of each recreation to recollect myself in order to form the supernatural intentions that I ought to have;

2. To make greater effort to cultivate the virtues of religion, charity, and humility at recreation;

3. At the evening examination of conscience to take particular account of the way I have spent my recreations.

The man of interior life soon recollecteth himself, because he never wholly poureth forth himself upon exterior things.¹

¹ IMIT. II: 1

SECOND PART

LANDMARKS

IN

PRIESTLY LIFE

LAND MARKS IN PRIESTLY LIFE

I

VOCATION

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Savior Jesus Christ called by his father to the priesthood and invested with the power of associating other priests with himself to continue his divine mission on earth. This holy priesthood he instituted on the eve of his death.

II. We will consider the existence of a vocation to the priesthood, the marks by which it may be known, and our duty in regard to our vocation.

1. *There is a divine vocation to the priesthood.* We see this in Christ's calling his apostles and in the choice of a successor to Judas. The reasons become evident if we consider the nature of the priesthood, its institutions, and the end which it is destined to serve.

2. *There are marks by which a vocation may be known.* The principal ones are these: aptitude, that is to say, certain qualities of body, mind, and heart, which indicate that a person is in a state to fulfil the sacred functions worthily; a strong and agreeable attraction to the priestly life; the call of our superiors.

3. *Our duty in regard to our vocation.* We must pray for light to know our vocation and for strength to follow it. Frightful evils would follow both for the Church and for ourselves should we enter the priesthood without a vocation. If we are really called, we must prepare diligently for our future ministry.

III. We will beg of God to direct us in the path he has chosen for us. We will determine to examine most carefully the evidence in regard to our own vocation.

We will resolve:

1. Until the question of our vocation is finally decided, to offer our communions to obtain the grace of knowing it clearly;

2. When such a decision shall have been made, to respond generously to God's call, whatever it may be.

Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Savior Jesus Christ, the great High Priest of the New Law, divinely called by his Father to the lofty honor of the priesthood and invested with the power of associating other priests with himself to continue on earth his mission of Redeemer and Sanctifier.

It is the eve of his death. Seated at table with his apostles, after eating the Jewish pasch,

he inaugurated another pasch, infinitely more holy and more august, by instituting the Blessed Eucharist and the holy priesthood. At the same time his look, penetrating the veils of the future, discerns in the succession of ages those whom God has predestined to be priests like him and with him. He includes them all in an act of infinite love, assigns them a special part in the graces that he is about to merit by his death for all mankind, and recommends them to his heavenly Father as the choicest portion of his flock.

Not satisfied with this designation, from heavens height he sees that, among the germs of vocation sown in the souls of men, a sufficient number will develop to maintain the ranks of his chosen priesthood. Indeed this is one of the principal objects of God's providence over the Church.

Thanks to his protection, the Church has never seen the source of priestly life dry up; always, as the veterans have disappeared, new recruits have come to replace them that the good work should not perish. Let us thank our blessed Lord for this. Let us bless him especially for the great number of holy priests by whom he has enriched his Church and who, at all times, have been its glorious crown. A

holy priest—is he not the richest gift that God can bestow on the Church?

My Savior, certain consoling signs permit me to believe that I am in the number of those whom thou hast chosen and whom thou deignest to call to the participation of thy priesthood. This thought gives me great joy and penetrates my heart with deepest gratitude.

Accomplish in me the work thus begun. Turn thy light and thy truth more and more upon me that it may lead me to thy holy mountain and to thy tabernacle. *Send forth thy light and thy truth*, says the psalmist, *they have conducted me and brought me unto thy holy hill. and into thy tabernacles.*¹

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Three thoughts will be the object of our meditation.

1. *There is a divine vocation to the priesthood*, that is to say, by an eternal decree God has chosen those who can legitimately pretend thereto, preparing for them at the same time the graces which they will need to fulfill their duties.

¹ Ps. 42³

We learn this truth in the first place from Holy Scripture itself where a divine vocation is represented as the essential condition for entrance into the priesthood. We have the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: *Neither doth any man take the honour to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was. So Christ also did not glorify himself, that he might be made a high priest: but he that saith unto him: Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place: Thou art a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchisedech.*¹

Our Savior himself chose his apostles, declaring that no one should enter the sheepfold to exercise the functions of shepherd except by the doorway; and he added: *I am the door.*² When there was question of choosing a successor for the traitor Judas, the apostles did not rely on themselves: they consulted the divine will and prayed God to make known to them that one whom he had chosen. *Praying, they said: Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, to take the place of his ministry and apostleship.*³

¹ HEB. 5⁴⁻⁶

² ST. JOHN 10⁹

³ ACTS 1²⁴

The Church's tradition has always held to the same belief. It is proclaimed by the Fathers of the Church. For example, we have the words of St. Leo: *The Church accepts for pastors only those whom the Holy Spirit has prepared.*¹ And we find it the unanimous teaching of the theologians a universal conviction in the mind of the Church.

There are excellent reasons for this doctrine. They become more evident when we consider the nature of the priesthood, its institution, and the end which it is destined to serve.

The *nature* of the priesthood. It is an eminent dignity, an incomparable honor which it would be presumptuous for us to bestow on ourselves. The priest exercises divine functions by virtue of which he dispenses the most august mysteries; to enter upon such functions without a call from God would be a usurpation. In fine, the fulfillment of the duties imposed on a priest requires special graces which are not accorded to every one. But how can one count on these graces if one is not called?

The *institution* of the priesthood. God himself founded it as he did the Church; the priesthood is, therefore, of divine right. God, how-

¹ III *Serm. de Asc.*

ever, does not act in an abstract and general manner; he has not established the society of his priests without determining in his divine decree who should be the members, without calling them.

The *end* of the priesthood. When God, in his infinite wisdom, proposes to himself some end to attain, he determines at the same time the instruments that will serve in the attainment and he gives them the requisite aptitude therefor; this is what constitutes a vocation. Now, the priesthood has a special end of its own which completely distinguishes it from the religious state: it is association with Jesus Christ to coöperate in his divine mediation and to work with him for the sanctification of souls. Consequently it requires a special vocation.

2. As there really is a sacerdotal vocation, so there must be sure *marks by which it may be known*. If it were otherwise, God's wisdom would be at fault. God, in the usual order of his providence, does not make his call known by a miraculous intervention, but through indications easy to point out, by means of which, provided one proceed rightly and with a sincere desire to know the divine will, one may certainly recognize the presence of a vocation.

Let us reflect upon the three chief marks that deserve especially to receive our attention.

The first is *aptitude*, that is to say certain qualities of body, mind, and heart, which indicate that a person is in a state to fulfill the sacred functions worthily. As God can not contradict himself, it is evident that if these qualities are lacking, at least to a considerable degree, there is no divine vocation. Those are not called to the priesthood who, by reason of some bodily deformity or physical infirmity, would be improper in the holy ministry; those who lack the degree of intelligence which is necessary for the acquisition of knowledge that must be found in a priest; those, in fine, for whom, by reason of the tendencies that lead them to evil, priestly virtue would be too difficult.

The second indication is the *attraction*. When God calls anyone to the priesthood, he does so by an attraction both agreeable and strong. It is an interior desire of such sort that the priesthood considered in itself, in its occupations, in the form of life that it exacts, is pleasing and agreeable to us. This attraction inclines us to believe that God wishes us in the priesthood that it is there we are to find the environment in which we ought to pass our life, that, in

entering upon it, we are conforming to the plans of divine Providence. The presence of this attraction, when it unites all the necessary conditions, is ordinarily a certain mark of vocation.

The third mark is the *call* of our superiors, that is, the favorable judgment of those to whom God has given the mission and grace of discerning vocations, of sifting out the unworthy and of opening the sanctuary to those whom they believe truly called. The Church has ever considered this control necessary; always the right of admitting or rejecting those who present themselves for holy orders has been attributed to the chief pastors. Without this sanction, even marks of vocation apparently sure ought to be regarded as illusions.

3. These two considerations have a *practical consequence* for us. Since there is a divine vocation to the holy priesthood and since this vocation is manifested by sure indications, it becomes our duty to consider most carefully whether these marks are present. First we must pray to God for light; then a serious self-examination and attentive study of our aptitudes, our tastes, our inclinations; and finally consultation with a wise and experienced director.

If all these lead to the conclusion that we have not the marks of a true vocation and that we are not called, we must unhesitatingly, fearlessly, notwithstanding the embarrassment that may ensue, withdraw and cease pursuing a career for which we were not intended.

To wish to be a priest in spite of the lack of a vocation would make us guilty of a great sin: it would be sacrilegious usurpation; opposition to the order of things willed by divine Providence. Our crime would be the greater since it would not consist in some passing act but would embrace our whole lifetime, a permanent and irremediable state of disorder.

But what deserves to be particularly considered is the frightful evil that would follow for the Church as well as for the individual who should thus enter the priesthood without a vocation. The Church may expect from such a priest only sacrileges, scandals, and the loss of souls. For the priest himself, it will be a life of ennui, of sadness, remorse, often of disgrace and dishonor. Nor is it unlikely that it may end in final impenitence and eternal reprobation.

If, on the contrary, we recognize that God calls us, we may advance with confidence, relying on the help of his grace which will never

fail us. Yet we can not believe that nothing is left for us to do. For we should prepare ourselves to fulfill the duties of our vocation, applying ourselves diligently to acquire what is requisite from the triple point of view of knowledge, piety, and virtue. Our superiors, in calling us, have recognized in us the necessary fitness: but this is only a germ which we must develop little by little. Such is the work to be accomplished during our years in the seminary—fruitful years on which so much of our success in the priesthood depends.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Do not permit, my God, that I fall into the dreadful evil of being a priest without a vocation. Rather would I undergo every misfortune, rather pass my life in obscurity and poverty. For, whatever might be the miseries which could assail me, I see none to compare with that of entering the ranks of thy shepherds against thy will.

Grant, therefore, my Savior, that I clearly know thy will. I am ready to follow it whether by entering the holy priesthood, shouldst thou call me, or by renouncing my aspirations there-to if thou wouldst have me serve thee in the

world. I repeat the words of the prophet Samuel: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*¹

I have determined to examine the evidence for the marks of my vocation with all the seriousness and diligence that so important an affair deserves. Having removed the obstacles that would be a cause of error for me and placing myself in a disposition of perfect indifference, I will study myself, my own soul. Looking over the past, I will ask myself at what period of my life the idea of the priesthood appeared in my soul and how it has been developed there; what were the first motives that directed my views towards this end, and what are those which determine me at this present moment. I will also ask myself what has been my former life from the point of view of sacerdotal holiness and what are the dispositions of my heart to-day. Do the past and the present give me a sufficient guarantee for perseverance in the future?

Having made such a study of my vocation, I will communicate it all frankly to my director; and I will submit to the judgment of his prudence and experience.

¹ I KINGS 3¹⁰

I resolve:

1. Until the question of my vocation is finally decided, to offer my communions to obtain the grace of knowing it clearly;

2. When such a decision shall have been made, to respond generously to God's call, whatever it may be.

*Lord, what wilt thou have me do?*¹

¹ ACTS 9⁶

II

THE SEMINARY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord preparing his apostles for the great mission he is about to confide to them. We will see in them the models that we ought to imitate during our sojourn in the seminary.

II. We will consider the seminary as a sown field in which we are the seeds.

1. The seed must be buried in the bosom of the earth and there lie hidden. We, too, must fulfill this same condition. The seminary must, therefore, be for us a sort of solitude, a separation from the world.

2. After being in the ground for some time, the seed undergoes an apparent death, the mysterious prelude of life. Likewise we must undergo a spiritual transformation. To clothe ourselves with Christ the new man, we must put off the old. It is necessary that whatever is defective in our soul disappear and die.

3. The seed emerges from the tomb that held it captive and will soon become a blossoming flower or even a sturdy tree. This is an image of what should take place within us. We should become a mystical tree planted in the garden of the Church to bear abundant fruits of grace.

III. We will beg of God not to permit that we neglect the numerous means of sanctification that abound here. To encourage and fortify ourselves against the weaknesses to which we are exposed, we will keep our future priesthood always before us.

We will take the following resolutions:

1. We will seek to profit by separation from the world and will avoid useless excursions into it;

2. We will strive to correct our faults by making use of all the means offered by life in the seminary.

Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord preparing his apostles for the great mission he is about to confide to them. Having called them to follow him, he keeps them near him; and during three years he labors to form them to the virtues of the apostolate. It is perfectly true that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, eternal Wisdom, through his word alone, supported by striking miracles, could have converted the world. Not so, however, has he undertaken to do it. Throughout his ministry he instructs a few disciples whom he destines to be his envoys and his representatives. Let us contemplate with reverence and love the charity, mildness,

and patience with which the divine Master inculcates his doctrine in the minds and hearts of his apostles; explaining more deeply to them what he teaches to the people in parables; ridding them of their defects; giving them to understand by lesson and example what a true apostle ought to be; what abnegation, what detachment, what perfection, what submission to God, what zeal he would have them practice.

These holy disciples, still imperfect, were however deeply penetrated with love for their divine Master, faithfully following him and docilly attentive to his teaching. Let us see in them the models that we ought to imitate during our sojourn in the seminary. It is for us what the school of Christ was for the apostles. Here we receive the same teaching; it is same end we seek to attain, the same formation of character to acquire. We have not their happiness of hearing the Savior's voice and seeing him preside over our exercises. Yet we know that it is he who speaks to us, that he is in our midst, and that we are the object of his tender solicitude.

Dear Lord, it is thou who didst inspire the Church to establish seminaries for the renewal of the clergy, thou who dost maintain in these

blessed houses the spirit of regularity and piety, forming, by a hidden but all-powerful action, priests of the Church according to thy own heart.

We thank thee for the countless blessings that have flowed from the seminaries ever since their foundation, for that unnumbered multitude of apostolic laborers, bishops, priests, religious, and missionaries who have obtained their priestly spirit in the seminary and have labored with unmeasured zeal and success for the sanctification of souls.

Despite my unworthiness, thou has admitted me to one of these holy dwellings. Grant that I may appreciate as I ought so great a favor and may show myself faithful to profit by it.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The Council of Trent wished that the houses destined for the development and culture of priestly vocations should be called seminaries, that is, according to the etymology of the word, a sown field. I am one of the seeds which the Church has sown in this field. The germ of my vocation, implanted by God in my heart, must here fructify. Here will I become a priest. Such is the thought which I seek to let sink

deep in my soul by this meditation. It will show me what is required of me as a seminarian.

1. That the seed may meet the desires and the expectation of the harvester, it must, in the first place, be buried in the bosom of the earth and there lie hidden. There, in a sort of tomb where it dwells as though lost and forgotten by all, take place astonishing transformations. If it remained at the surface, it would soon be eaten by the birds or dried up by the sun or carried by the wind afar off to barren ground. As soon, therefore, as the seed is placed in the furrow, it is covered over with earth.

He who aspires to the priesthood, a mystical seed of the Church, must fulfill this same condition. Not in the midst of the world will he learn the gravity of priestly bearing, cultivate piety and virtue, or acquire the knowledge he needs. In the world there is too much noise, too much restless activity, too much dissipation of mind,^f too much distraction. His soul, still delicate, would there be exposed to dangerous and powerful seductions. God's grace, which operates more effectively in solitude and peace, would not be able to exercise its vivifying influence to the same degree; and

the voice of the Holy Spirit would scarcely be heard. Thus, instead of developing, the germ of his vocation would wither and dry up little by little. Doubtless many vocations are lost by the deplorable influence of worldly surroundings.

The seminary must be for me a sort of solitude where I may be hidden, forgotten like the seed in the earth. During the years of my training, the seminary should be my world in the segregation and solitude of which I should seek my pleasures and from which I should issue forth into the world as seldom as possible.

2. The seed, after being in the ground for some time, gradually sheds its enveloping cover; its substance changes; it undergoes a sort of death, the mysterious prelude of life. It is our Lord himself who said to his apostles: *Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*¹

This law of material seeds has its counterpart in the spiritual seeds planted in the soil of the seminary. In them likewise a transformation must take place, in which process the first

¹ ST. JOHN 12²⁴⁻²⁵

step is that they die. St. Paul teaches us in what this death consists when he tells us that, to clothe ourselves with Christ the new man, we must put off the old.

This great work must be accomplished in us during the years of our seminary preparation. Just as the grain of wheat hidden in the ground loses its first form to put on a new one, so also it is necessary that whatever is defective in our soul disappear and die. We carry within us, in consequence of original sin more or less evil habits, tendencies inclining us to sin, pride in its various forms, sensuality with all the disorders it entails, countless attachments by which we cling to created things. We must despoil ourselves of all this life of nature which the great apostle, in his energetic language, calls the flesh. It is the enemy we must combat at every turn, watching his slightest movements so as to repel his attacks at once, arming ourselves with strength and courage for the encounter, working with untiring energy to reform whatever we find reprehensible in ourselves.

We must, indeed, inflict this death upon ourselves. And it is the more difficult since we ourselves are the enemy to be fought and conquered. The accomplishment of our task means a victory over self, the hardest of all

victories. We will confidently undertake this work of self-knowledge and self-discipline, realizing that what may be impossible to our unaided powers we can accomplish when helped by the grace of our seminary life.

3. The death of the seed planted in the earth is only apparent. It has not perished. The germ subsists and, when relieved of its outer envelope, displays all its vital energy. A marvelous phenomenon begins. Drawing from the soil the vivifying nourishment that is found there, this little germ grows and develops. Soon it leaves the tomb that held it captive and will become a blossoming plant or even a sturdy tree.

All this is a fine image of what should take place within us in the seminary. We also possess, under a rough envelope, a germ which the Holy Spirit placed in our soul on the day of our baptism. Planted in the blessed soil of seminary life, fertilized by the life-giving principles with which God fills our life here, this germ will develop if we faithfully coöperate, following a progress slow and scarcely perceptible, yet certain. And when the time arrives, it will come forth a priest, a grand creature of God, the greatest work of his power, a mystical tree planted in the garden of the Church to bear abundant fruits of grace; a priest, who,

having drunk in holiness at the living springs of seminary life, will in turn impart it to other souls and will be a source of life for them.

However, to bring about this happy result, our coöperation is required. Among plants nourished by the same soil, some are large, vigorous, full of life, while others are feeble and devoid of beauty. Not otherwise is it with spiritual plants nourished by the soil of the seminary life. There are the same helps for all. All hear the same words, share in the same exercises, live outwardly the same life. And yet, from the point of view of perfection and progress, what a difference they present. Because in all the coöperation is far from being the same. Let us reflect seriously on this truth.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Called as I am to the honor and privilege of taking part in the community life of this seminary, would I be so unfortunate, my God, as not to take advantage of the numerous means of sanctification that abound here? Dear Lord, do not permit it. If, until the present, I have not appreciated as I should have the advantages that are offered to me here for the formation of a priestly character, enlighten my darkness. If, yielding to a weak-willed lack of courage,

I have not made the sacrifices which the rule asks of me, strengthen me by thy grace and give me the generosity that is wanting.

I wish to be a good, fervent seminarian. To encourage and fortify myself against the weakness to which I am exposed, I will keep my future priesthood always before me. Repeatedly I will say to myself: "In a few years I will be a priest. When the day will have come for me to be elevated to this lofty dignity, how would I wish to have employed the time which is now at my disposal?" And what bitter regrets would I not have if I should be constrained to acknowledge that I had not profited thereby, that by my own fault I had rendered useless the means of holiness which God bestowed abundantly upon me?

I take the following resolutions:

1. I will seek to profit by separation from the world and will avoid useless excursions into it;

2. I will strive to correct my faults by making use of all the means offered by life in the seminary.

Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.¹

¹ ST. JOHN . 2 24-26

III

AUTHORITY OF THE RULE

SUMMARY

I. We will adore God, the source and principle of all power and authority, bestowing on his creatures the right to command and to make laws. We will adore in Christ the fulness of this power. And we will acknowledge the communication of his authority to those whom God has invested with a more limited right to command.

II. We will consider the sources whence the rule is derived, the men of God who have been its authors, and the divine power in whose name it is imposed on us.

1. *The sources of the rule.* They are Holy Scripture, the writings of the Fathers, papal constitutions, canons of Councils, and statutes of diocesan synods.

2. *The authors of the rule.* In the first place the Fathers of the Council of Trent. To these we must add especially the name of St. Charles, Archbishop of Milan.

3. *The rule emanates from the bishop's authority.* Our immediate superiors are the bishop's representatives in promulgating and enforcing the rule. We may begin here that submission of obedience which we will formally promise to our bishop on the day of our ordination.

III. We will acknowledge that the rule is for us an expression of God's will. And we will reflect that this conviction should give us a greater respect and love for all it prescribes.

We will resolve:

1. To cultivate a greater interior respect for the rule;
2. To observe its prescription with punctual fidelity.

Purifying your souls in the obedience of charity.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God, the source and principle of all power and authority, communicating to his creatures the right to command and to make laws. It is on the brow of men that God has imprinted the seal of his power; they are his authoritative representatives. To them he delegates the right to make known the orders of his divine will.

Thus in human society legitimate authority is constituted by way of participation in God's absolute dominion over all things. *There is no power but from God*, says St. Paul: *and those that are, are ordained of God.*¹ The obedience that we observe is, then, not weak servility

¹ ROM. 13¹

nor a necessity imposed on us by force, but the expression of respect and submission that we owe to God; it is raised to the height of a Christian virtue and, in a certain way, a religious act.

Let us adore in Christ the fulness of this power communicated by God to human nature. Let us acknowledge his supreme right to impose laws upon us and to subject our will as well as our intellect thereto, in virtue of the absolute sovereignty that God has given him over all. *All power is given to me in heaven and in earth.*¹ Let us joyfully submit to his sway.

Let us respect also those more limited but real communications of his authority that God has made to those on earth who are invested with the right to command. We see it in the Supreme Pontiff, the bishops, and the priests of the Church; in the various rulers and magistrates charged with maintaining order and harmony in political societies; in the laws that emanate from any legitimate authority whatsoever. From this height should we regard the rule of the seminary, respect, and observe it.

¹ ST. MATTHE. 28¹⁸

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The seminary rule, considered from the point of view of its authority, is worthy of all respect. That we may better appreciate this, let us consider: the sources whence the rule is derived; the men of God who have been its authors; the divine power in whose name it is imposed on us.

1. *The sources of the rule.* They are Holy Scripture, the writings of the Fathers, papal constitutions, canons of Councils, and statutes of diocesan synods.

The incarnate Word of God, during his sojourn on earth, offered, to the world in his person the most perfect model of priestly life. It was not the austere life of the cloister, with its rigors, its silence, its absolute separation from the world; but a life apparently quite ordinary in which we discover nothing eccentric, nothing startling, yet in which everything is worthy, grave, modest, holy. This is the adorable type proposed for the imitation of the clergy, the type which the seminary rule seeks to cultivate.

The apostles, after reproducing it in their own persons, have left us its principal features in their epistles and have outlined that admir-

able picture which, from century to century, is being completed in a way to make more resplendent the beauty of the original which it tries to reproduce.

There is not a Father of the Church who does not give us some details of the life, manners, character, holiness, modesty, or zeal which is proper to the priesthood.

General and particular councils have been occupied with the question and have outlined the rules which ecclesiastics ought to follow that their life may correspond to the loftiness of their sublime mission, often repeating their obligation of becoming well instructed and holy.

Supreme Pontiffs in their constitutions and bishops in their ordinances have again and again reminded priests of the holiness of their state of life, even minutely setting forth the details of their life, their clothes, their furniture, their occupations, their entire conduct in relation to God, their neighbor, and themselves.

In this way, little by little, the type of priest which our Lord wishes to have on earth is unfolded. If one could gather together the various traits that are to be found in the venerable monuments of Christian tradition and

unite them harmoniously, one would have the most complete ideas of priestly character and manners. This, however, is what we find in the rule of the seminary.

This rule, destined to develop in the soul of young aspirants the germs of the priestly vocation and to form in them true priests of Christ, does not rest upon any theory arbitrarily conceived. No, it is the precise expression of the Church's holy traditions, reproducing with religious exactness the substance of the canons relating to the life of seminarians. In the rule there is not a single important prescription that can not be justified by the most weighty testimony.

2. *The men of God who have been the authors of the rule.* In the first place the Fathers of the Council of Trent. This venerable assembly, wishing to remedy certain evils in the Church and to establish a salutary reform of the clergy, believed that it could accomplish such a purpose in no better way than by founding seminaries. Not content with declaring the importance of this work and inculcating in the minds of bishops the necessity of establishing them in their dioceses, the Council went further and even formulated in a summary manner the rules to be observed in seminaries,

the conditions of admission, the subjects to be studied, the exercises, exterior conduct, causes of expulsion, etc. Here then we may find the first outline of the seminary rule.

To the Council of Trent we must add the name of St. Charles, the illustrious Archbishop of Milan. It is well known that, among the great works of his life, the reform of the clergy held the first rank. We know also that it was above all by founding seminaries he sought to accomplish his design. He developed and completed the rules summarily laid down by the Council of Trent. By his careful application he drew up a rule for his seminaries that has served as the basis and model for those which are in use to-day.

Such are the men who established the seminaries and gave a rule of life to them. They were priests of eminent learning and holiness, filled with the spirit that makes holy priests, themselves a model of every apostolic virtue. Whoever will study their life will become convinced that they were providentially raised up for the work of renewing the spirit of the priesthood, and that God filled them with his own spirit for the establishment of these houses of priestly formation, for determining the rules, and for fixing all the details of the life.

3. *The rule emanates from the bishop's authority.* Before being put in force in this seminary the rule has been submitted to the bishop that he might examine it and give it his approval. It is, therefore, the expression of his will in our regard. Our superiors here in the seminary promulgate it, explain and interpret it, see to its observance, because they are the echo of a more authoritative voice, representatives of a sacred power to which we owe obedience.

The bishop, chosen and appointed by the Supreme Pontiff, is invested with authority to make laws for his diocese. This right is exercised in three ways: by the orders addressed to the entire flock, orders in which the chief pastor of the diocese enacts certain rules for the faithful to follow to save and sanctify their souls; by diocesan statutes and pastoral letters which place before the priests' eyes what are their duties and obligations; finally by the seminary rules by means of which the episcopal authority extends directly to the young clerics, prescribing the exercises to which they should devote themselves, the means they should take to become worthy of the orders they will one day receive, faithful coöperators of their bishop, priests to whom he can entrust a part of his pastoral solicitude. Hence the seminarian who

obeys the rule has begun that submission of obedience which clerics and priests owe to the bishop.

The Church requires that on the day of his ordination the new priest should make a solemn promise of respect and obedience to his bishop. *Promittis mihi et successoribus meis reverentiam et obedientiam?*¹ the bishop asks. And the priest replies: *Promitto*. When made by one who, as a seminarian, has already learned submission to the bishop's orders by observing the seminary rule, this promise presents serious guarantees of future fidelity.

Would it be the same if he who makes this promise had shown himself, during his clerical education, insubordinate and disobedient? Having despised the authority of the bishop as expressed in the rule, is it probable that he will respect it later on when it may exact more painful sacrifices of him?

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, the rule is for me an expression of thy will. This consoling thought should give me a greater love for all it prescribes. There

¹ PONTIF. ROM.

are good and righteous souls in the world who desire nothing so much as to fulfill thy holy will but who experience difficulty in always knowing just what it requires of them. It is not so with me. Thy will, clearly manifested in the rule, makes known to me in detail what I ought to be doing at every hour of the day in order that I may become a good priest. I will respect and love the rule.

I will respect it and consequently will not permit myself to find fault with it, to speak of it with contempt or ridicule. On the contrary I will regard it as a work that has met with God's approval and has been perfected with his assistance, as a practical résumé of what Christian tradition prescribes for the training of the clergy.

I will love the rule and hence will observe faithfully what it prescribes and avoid what it forbids. Not only will I observe it outwardly but I will enter into the spirit that has inspired it so as always to conform my actions to its purpose. To make myself acceptable for the priesthood to which God has called me, he exacts so little of me, that I will perform that little with a whole-heartedness and a generous good will. *May God. . . . give you all*

*a heart to worship him, and to do his will with a great heart, and a willing mind.*¹

Blessed Mary, thou wast always faithful to the will of God; therein lay thy perfection. By thy intercession obtain from thy divine Son that I be faithful to his will as it is made known to me in the rule of this holy house.

I resolve:

1. To cultivate a greater interior respect for the rule;

2. To observe its prescriptions with punctual fidelity.

*Purifying your souls in the obedience of charity.*²

¹ M^{ACC}. 1³

² I P^{ET}. 1²³

IV

OBSERVANCE OF THE RULE

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore the incarnate Word, the model of that obedience with which we ought to submit to the rule. From the first instant of his mortal life even to his last breath he never departed from the rule of his Father's will.
- II. We may consider the advantages to be derived from the rule as included in these three:
 1. *It makes amends for the past*, as its faithful observance involves truly penitential practices, genuine self-abnegation.
 2. *It sanctifies the present*. The discipline of the rule is, for those who submit to it generously, a powerful means of elevating their souls and making them capable of great things for God. The influence of the rule on our character is gradual but its final result a very considerable growth in holiness.
 3. *It is a guarantee for the future*. God alone knows with certitude what we will make of our priesthood. Yet we have a highly probable indication in the degree of our present fidelity to the rule.
- III. We will perceive that God has renewed the spirit of the clergy by the establishment of seminaries. And we will make up our mind to adopt an attitude of more exact conformity to the rule.

We will resolve:

1. To give an example of fidelity to the rule;
2. Each evening to examine our conscience in the matter of our faults against the rule.

Quicumque hanc regulam secuti fuerint, pax super illos et misericordia.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the incarnate Word, the model of that obedience with which we ought to submit to the rule. From the outset of his life on earth not only did he accept with love and reverence the law which his divine Father imposed upon him: *thy law in the midst of my heart*;¹ but he also showed himself ever most faithful in fulfilling its precepts.

From the first instant of his mortal life even to his last breath he departed not from that rule. Whatever sacrifice it required, he never failed in the obedience that he owed to God. This obedience was universal; for the Savior accomplished his Father's will even in the smallest matter. It was a perfect obedience; for in all his acts, Jesus conformed himself exactly to whatever God asked of him as to the time, the place, and other circumstances.

It was generous; for he obeyed not only without repugnance or distaste but with joy of heart. And it was inspired by the purest desire of glorifying and pleasing God.

With entire truth our Lord could testify that he had fulfilled perfectly the divine command of his Father: *As the Father hath given me commandment, so do I;*¹ and to have held the will and good pleasure of his heavenly Father as his only rule. *I do always the things that please him;*² to have loved this holy will in such a way that it was, so to speak, his daily nourishment. *My meat is to do the will of him that sent me.*³

In the last day of his life he could present himself confidently to God and ask, in recompense for this obedience, the glory that had been promised him. *I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now glorify thou me, O Father with thyself, with the glory which I had, before the world was, with thee.*⁴ I have obeyed thee, I have accomplished my task, I have achieved my work, and now it is for thee to glorify me. These are words well calculated to encourage

¹ ST. JOHN 14³¹

² ST. JOHN 8²⁹

³ ST. JOHN 4³⁴

⁴ ST. JOHN 17⁴⁻⁶

a seminarian in fidelity to his rule that he too may be able to say: *And now glorify thou me, O Father.* Glorify me, my God, on earth, by honoring me with thy priesthood for which I have prepared by years of obedience; in heaven, by the possession of that eternal blessedness promised to them who truly obey.

Having adored Christ, the model of obedient souls, let us also honor his blessed mother and all the saints who have gone to God by the way of obedience, sacrificing their self-will, and especially those who, like us, lived a community life under a rule, who progressed in holiness by their very submission to their rule.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The advantages to be derived from the faithful observance of the rule, I may regard as included in these three principal ones: it repairs the past, sanctifies the present, and is a guarantee for the future.

1. *It makes amends for the past.* What soul, truly moved by God's mercy, does not feel the need of doing penance? We know to what pious excess this need of penance sometimes carried the saints. Deeply conscious of their obligation to satisfy God's justice, they prac-

ticed frightful austerities with even greater ardor than sensual worldlings pursue the pleasures of earth.

My God, more than once thou hast made me feel this need of expiating my offenses. Looking over the sins of my life, from early childhood even to the present day, I have asked myself what I did by way of reparation for all that. Thy grace, acting in me, made me resolve to live henceforth not only free from sin but truly penitent for the past. And I have looked for some penitential practices within my reach and my powers. But here is a most excellent means at hand without my looking further. It is the rule.

In fact, what is penance? Is it not the renouncement of my own will, my tastes, my caprices, that which flatters the senses; is it not the life of sacrifice and immolation, the cross carried in the footsteps of my Savior on the road to Calvary? To some extent the practice of the rule provides such sacrifices.

In following this law that is imposed by another, will, I renounce my own, I offer a complete self-abnegation of what I hold most dear, my liberty, my independence; I do, not what always pleases me, but what my Lord asks of me; I sacrifice my will to God's good pleasure; I bend my shoulders beneath the cross.

In those penitential practices that I might choose for myself, I would have to fear either indiscreet excess or self-love. But there is no danger of this in obedience to the rule as an act of penance.

2. *It sanctifies the present.* What a facility for growth in holiness is to be found in the very environment in which I am placed? It is a seclusion, removed from distracting care, far from worldly noise and tumult, under the eyes of God and my conscience. What favorable circumstances for recollection and silence! At the same time it is a community life where all the members, pursuing their way towards the same end as I am, encourage me by their example, help me by their prayers, and by their society make pleasant a solitude that would otherwise be painfully contrary to my nature. If there is in the whole world a place where holy thoughts should arise, where the desire of belonging to God should be born and developed, where fervor should be enkindled and the will strengthened in good, surely it is the seminary.

While it places me in so holy an atmosphere, the rule also imposes a severe discipline which, if I submit to it generously, will be a powerful means to raise up my soul and make it

capable of great things for God. This discipline is not in any way austere, it presses upon us with a weight proportioned to our strength but which we can feel.

The rule, with this admirable mixture of mildness and force, asks of us each day and each hour some new acts of virtue. It moderates and coördinates everything, our bodily actions as well as the aspirations of our soul, strengthens what is good and suppresses what is bad. It gives us habits of order, self-restraint, prudence, exactitude, dignity, which are so becoming to any man; mortification, humility, patience, and charity which mark a true Christian soul. The influence of the rule on our character is a gradual process, imperceptible at any particular moment of its formation, but very considerable in its final result.

What an astonishing abundance of spiritual helps for our progress we find offered us in the course of the day! Each morning a considerable time is devoted to prayer; the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, the prayers before and after meals and classes should renew the impressions that we carried away from the meditation and help us to remain continually recollected in God's presence. The spirit of prayer is, thanks to our rule, as it were, the very atmosphere that we breathe.

3. *It is a guarantee for the future.* Who among us, casting an anxious look into the future, has not asked himself: What sort of priest will I be? Will I be a consolation to the Church by my piety, the purity of my life, my zeal; or will I be a cause of sadness and affliction to her?

How important a question it is, after all. And how precious would we regard any present assurance of that future. It is, however, not susceptible of a precise and certain solution. For God alone knows with certitude what we will make of that priesthood which is coming nearer every day.

Nevertheless, though deprived of an infallible forecast, we have a highly probable indication in the degree of our present fidelity to the rule.

A first and capital condition of our future perseverance is that we be truly called. Now, the observance of the rule and a serious application to the duties imposed by it will furnish us with a means of studying our vocation and of not deceiving ourselves in so grave an affair.

We need also the grace to correspond with our vocation. This, too, will be the reward of fidelity to the rule. Surely it will bring down the blessing of God. He will bestow upon us

in abundance the graces we need. Well prepared for each succeeding ordination, we will receive an extraordinary communication of the life of Christ and come forth from the seminary on the day of our priesthood enriched with precious gifts of God, our soul prepared and fortified for a holy, zealous ministry.

In fine, we can say that the habits of piety, virtue, love of work, order and regularity which are formed and strengthened by the rule, form a powerful presumption in favor of our perseverance in the future.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, the rule of the seminary is an expression of thy holy will and a code of spiritual perfection. For me at present it is the way that leads to thee. I am yet more convinced this is so when I consider the fruits that have accrued to the Church by the establishment of seminaries. Since these holy places of sacerdotal training have been opened, the spirit of the clergy has been renewed; disorders and scandals have disappeared; the piety, regularity, and learning which it was the misfortune of preceding ages to lose, have been recovered. An immense result has been obtained, and

nothing shows more plainly the profound wisdom of the rules established by the founders of these blessed houses.

A multitude of good priests formed their sacerdotal character by a life of preparation in simple conformity to these rules. What they have done I can do. Nor are there wanting edifying and encouraging examples before my eyes every day.

Henceforth I will adopt a new attitude towards the rule, one of more exact conformity. I will make this my first and chief practice of penance. I will regard it as the principal means of sanctification in my possession.

I resolve:

1. To give an example of fidelity to the rule;

2. Each evening to examine my conscience in the matter of my faults against the rule.

*Quicumque hanc regulam secuti fuerint, pax super illos et misericordia.*¹

¹ GAL. 6¹⁶

V

TONSURE

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our Savior at the moment of his blessed incarnation offering his entire being to God. He founded the grace of the clerical promise and communicated it to Mary, and to all holy priests and levites. *Dominus pars hereditatis meae.*
- II. We will consider the cleric receiving tonsure as enrolled, marked, and set apart for the sacrifice.
1. *Enrolled for the sacrifice.* The first thing we notice in the ceremony of tonsure is the voluntary engagement to enter God's service.
2. *Marked for the sacrifice.* By the symbolic cutting of the hair the Church teaches us that we should remove every sensual desire from our heart and all worldly appearances from our outward life. The cassock is intended to remind us that we profess a desire to die to the world.
3. *Separated for the sacrifice.* The tonsured cleric is admitted to the sanctuary and, as a mark of his dignity, wears the surplice, a symbol of the life of Christ, the true victim who lives only for God.
- III. We will regard the ceremony of tonsure as an offering the end of which should be sacrifice. We will ask ourselves whether we have taken this lofty view of it, whether we have given ourselves gener-

ously and joyously to God. We will seek to repair whatever defects we may observe in our dispositions.

We will resolve to recall and renew our clerical promise whenever putting on the cassock.

Dominus pars hereditatis meæ et calicis mei; tu es qui restitues hereditatem meam mihi.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Savior at the moment of his blessed incarnation offering his entire being to God. From the beginning of the world the blood of victims had been poured forth; but the very multitude of these sacrifices bore witness to their powerlessness. The soul of Christ, as soon as created, understands that the Redeemer's mission is to substitute himself for all these other victims whose immolation was of value only because they prefigured his own sacrifice. He accepts this mission with all the humiliation and suffering that it will entail. Offering himself to the eternal Father, he rejoices to be the victim of expiation destined to take away the sins of the world. *For it is impossible, says St. Paul, that with the blood of oxen and goats sin should be taken away. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith: Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst*

*not: but a body thou hast fitted to me: holocausts for sin did not please thee. Then said I: Behold I come.*¹

A few days after his birth he renews his vow of self-immolation in the mystery of the Circumcision and the Presentation. And we may say that it was the habitual disposition of his life even to the moment when he fulfilled it in reality on the cross.

Christ, at his very entrance into this world, founded the grace of the clerical promise. Let us honor the communication of this grace to Mary when she offered herself to God in the Temple, uniting her sacrifice with that of her son; to the patriarchs, prophets, and just men of the Old Law who, as prelude to the oblation of our Savior, presented themselves to God to be his interpreters and mouthpiece, saying in the words of Samuel: *Here am I: for thou calledst me;*² or of Isaias: *I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: Whom shall I send? . . . And I said: Lo, here am I, send me;*³ of the apostles, saying with St. Paul: *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*⁴ of all holy priests and levites of the New Law, who love

¹ HEB. 10⁵⁷

² KINGS 3⁶

³ IS. 6⁸

⁴ ACTS 9⁶

to repeat every day of their life the words of the clerical promise: *Dominus pars hereditatis meæ et calicis mei; tu es qui restitues hereditatem meam mihi.*¹

In union with Christ, the model of all clerics, let us renew our solemn engagements and promises to God: *Behold, I come to do thy will, O God.*²

III. CONSIDERATIONS

Ordination is a sacrifice by which the cleric constitutes himself God's victim; and like the mass, this sacrifice begins with an offertory, the ceremony of tonsure. We will consider the cleric receiving tonsure as enrolled, marked, and set apart for the sacrifice.

1. *Enrolled for the sacrifice.* What I first notice in the ceremony of tonsure is a solemn engagement made by the cleric to enter the service of God, to belong to him under a new title, and to lead the life of a victim. This engagement is, to be sure, not irrevocable; nevertheless it is sacredly made, the more sacred as it is now-days undertaken with more maturity and reflection than formerly.

¹ Ps. 15⁵

² HER. 10⁹

Every contract supposes the agreement of two free wills. We have the free offering of the cleric. In the Old Law the victims did not present themselves voluntarily for the sacrifice. Christ was the first to offer himself freely. And the candidate for tonsure acts in like manner. The Church does not solicit his self-offering, does not constrain him. But in his solitary meditations, he has felt an attraction of grace inviting him to the sacrifice. He has understood that it is noble and glorious not to live for one's self, but for God; and, under the influence of this thought, he presents himself to the bishop, humbly begging the favor of admission to the ranks of the clergy.

The bishop has granted his petition, has called down on him the blessings of heaven, and has permitted him to pronounce the words of the clerical consecration: *Dominus pars hereditatis meæ.*

2. *Marked for the sacrifice.* First there is the symbolic cutting of the hair, by which the Church would have the new cleric understand that he should remove from his heart every sensual desire and from his external appearance every thing immodest, vain, or unpriestly; that he should no more seek the enjoyment of worldly pleasures; that he should henceforth follow

a life in a certain sense apart from the pleasures that the world seeks with such intensity, from riches and glory which the ambitious desire so passionately. He is now a voluntary victim who ought to live for the sacrifice.

To make this expression of renouncement more complete, the Church wishes that the cleric be dressed in the cassock, a habit which, by its color, form, and simplicity, indicated that he who wears it professes that he wishes to die to the world and all it contains. To die to the world is the highest degree of renouncement. It is the state of a soul in which the struggle of grace and nature has ceased, whose passions are subdued, which no longer feels the sting of concupiscence; of a soul, in short, that leads a true life of sacrifice. Whoever wears the cassock professes, let us not say to be in that state, but at least to desire to approach it and make new efforts each day to progress constantly towards it.

3. *Separated for the sacrifice.* The victim which the cleric offers to God in his own person has not yet been immolated, but it already belongs to God. Applying to the newly tonsured the psalm which David sang when the ark was introduced into the Tabernacle prepared for it, the Church asks the bishop to

open the gate of the sanctuary and admit the new cleric whom she calls a king of glory: *Lift up your gates, O ye princes and, be ye lifted up, O eternal gates: and the King of Glory shall enter in.*¹ The bishop acquiesces. It is then he places the surplice on the cleric, who will henceforth wear it over the cassock at the sacred ceremonies as a mark of his dignity.

The surplice is a symbol of the life of Christ the true victim who lives only for God. It expresses the most perfect degree of sacrifice, that consummation which characterizes the priesthood. It is true the tonsured cleric has not yet attained to that but it is the object of his aspirations; and the Church, in clothing him with the surplice, would place it before him as the purpose of all his efforts.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

In whatever way I regard the ceremony of tonsure it appears to me as an offering whose end should be sacrifice. Although not an order, yet it includes, in a certain sense, all the orders, in which the new cleric participates by desire and by the aspirations of his soul, engaging himself to receive their obligations in due time.

¹ Ps. 23¹

In the mystery of Christ's Presentation in the Temple I see neither the bloody sweat of his agony nor the scourge and the thorns of the pretorium, nor the cross, the nails, the lance of Calvary. And yet the offering of himself that Christ made implied all these sufferings since, in offering himself to God as victim, he accepted them all. Thus is it with the engagement that the cleric contracts with God and with the Church. Is this the view which I have taken of my tonsure? Have I considered myself as a victim at the foot of the altar? Have I offered myself to God with unstinted generosity, without reserve? In dedicating my heart to God, have I been able to say as the king of Israel said when dedicating the Temple that he built: *I also in the simplicity of my heart, have joyfully offered all these things.*¹ Have I truly given all and given it with joyous heart?

At thy feet, my Savior, I confess that my offering has not been without reserve. Probably that explains the inconstancy of my resolutions and my unfaithfulness to the engagements of my tonsure.

My God, I wish to repair these defects and

¹ I PAR. 29¹⁷

firmly establish a disposition to renounce worldliness and seek the supernatural life. I have declared myself a victim for God; I will live as becomes such a victim: I belong to the Church; hence the vanities of the world will be as nothing in my sight: the Church has consecrated me to God; I will therefore banish from my heart all worldly thoughts, all earthly attachment.

I resolve to recall and renew my clerical promise whenever putting on the cassock.

*Dominus pars hereditatis meæ et calicis mei; tu es qui restitues hereditatem meam mihi.*²

² Ps. 15⁵

VI

MINOR ORDERS

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord preparing for his self-immolation during the thirty-three years that he willed to pass on earth. We will honor this same disposition in Mary living in the Temple after her presentation. And we will regard this life of Jesus on earth and of Mary in the Temple as the image of that which the Church prescribes for the cleric in the seminary.

II. We will consider the minor orders as inculcating the doctrine of sacrifice, communicating the grace of sacrifice, and making a trial thereof.

1. *They inculcate the doctrine of sacrifice.* This begins with love for the Church recommended in the ordination of door-keeper. The reader is directed to sacrifice intellectual pride in the study of Scripture and all the sacred sciences. The exorcist should entirely free himself from the sway of sin. To the acolyte is recommended the obligation to lead a religious life occupied with the worship of God.

2. *The minor orders communicate the grace of sacrifice.* The duties of the priesthood suppose a special supernatural help which, however, God wills to communicate by degrees. This fulness of grace

that he intends for his priests he bestows in part at each successive order received.

3. *The minor orders make trial of the sacrifice.* Each of them imposes certain duties upon us. In minor orders we should acquire that love for the Church, that eagerness for sacred science, that zeal for the salvation of souls, and that sanctification of our own soul, which will become the different aspects of the great sacrifice embracing our whole priestly life.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we are ready to submit to these trials of sacrifice which the orders that we receive impose on us. Are we not found wanting when called upon to make even slight and ordinary sacrifices now? We will ask God to strengthen our will in the little things which constitute our present duties that we may later on be faithful in those which are greater.

We will resolve:

1. To study the teachings of the Pontifical;

2. To prepare properly for the minor orders so as to receive the abundance of grace which they bestow;

3. To cultivate with special care the virtues proper to these orders.

They shall go from virtue to virtue.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord preparing for his self-immolation and devoting to this preparation the thirty-three years that he willed to

pass on earth. During all that time he kept ever in view the sacrifice to which he had vowed himself. *I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized: and how am I straightened until it be accomplished?*¹ Without fear he foresaw it, and he accepted it generously. The interior dispositions of his soul all led to the offering of himself to God.

Let us honor this same disposition in Mary living in the Temple after her presentation. In this holy place she passed the years of her maidenhood; and, to strengthen herself in the generous resolution which she had taken, and become a victim more and more worthy of God, she was ever more profoundly penetrated with the thought of the sacrifice always before her eyes. She devoted herself to pious exercises that kindled more ardently the fire of divine love.

This life of Jesus on earth and of Mary in the Temple is the image of that which the Church prescribes for the cleric in the seminary after his tonsure and which is characterized by the reception of minor orders. A precious time it is during which, by purifying and sanctifying his soul, he should become less unworthy of being offered on the altar of God.

¹ ST. LUKE 12⁵⁰

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The minor orders are the steps by which the Church leads a seminarian to the holy priesthood. They inculcate the doctrine of sacrifice, communicate the grace of sacrifice, and make a trial thereof.

1. *They inculcate the doctrine of sacrifice.* Each of the minor orders contains a teaching that the Church has consigned in the Pontifical and that the bishop imparts to ordinands as they present themselves before him to take another step towards the priesthood.

These instructions which he hears constantly during his entire course in the seminary, at meditation, spiritual reading, public and private conferences, all have one object in view, the doctrine of sacrifice. It is the explanation, development, and application of the *Dominus pars* pronounced on the day of tonsure and of the mysterious and symbolic ceremonies that accompanied it.

This doctrine begins with love for the Church, recommended in the ordination of Ostiary. First, a regard for the material house of God over which he must watch, its beauty and adornment. But the chief exhortation is to love the spiritual Church which he will one day

be called upon to sanctify by works of zeal, ready to die, if need be, in order to serve and defend it.

In the ordination of Lector we find a recommendation to study the Scriptures and all the sacred sciences. It is a sacrifice of the intellect to which we should refuse the vain satisfactions of curiosity or caprice, avoiding all dangerous or useless reading, applying ourselves diligently to serious study and refusing to be discouraged by any difficulties we may encounter.

To the Exorcist the Church recommends zeal for the salvation of souls. He receives the power to expel evil spirits from the possessed. But this power is the symbol of that which the priest exercises in delivering souls from the slavery of sin. At the same time the Church admonishes the Exorcist that he should himself be entirely free from the sway of this enemy of God and man. In us the devil's empire has a double auxiliary: pride, which puffs us up, and sensuality, which inclines us to seek worldly pleasures and satisfactions. The Exorcist should strive to expel these two disorders from his soul. Finally the doctrine of sacrifice includes the obligation recommended to the Acolyte to live a religious life occupied

with the worship of God: an interior spirit of religion in the faithful performance of the functions assigned to him and in the practice of prayer. The candle in his hand expresses the good example required of him.

2. *The minor orders communicate the grace of sacrifice.* In whatever manner this communication of grace is effected, whether there be for each minor order a sacramental rite imparting grace, or whether the divine grace is given solely in response to the prayers that the Church places on the lips of the bishop, there is in each of these orders an outpouring of divine grace. It is a participation in that fulness of divine life which comes with the sacerdotal ordination; a light for the mind and a holy unction to strengthen the will.

The duties of the priesthood, summed up in a complete self-sacrifice, clearly suppose a special supernatural help, a particular communication of the holy Spirit more abundantly bestowed than in the case of the ordinary faithful.

God wishes this communication to be successive and by degrees. He does not give to the delicate shoot just emerging from the ground all the strength of which it will have

need to withstand the tempest when it becomes a great tree; he bestows it little by little according as the plant grows. A newly born infant has not the force of a man but acquires it with his years.

In the order of grace as in that of nature God ordinarily proceeds gradually and distributes his gifts according to the rule of a wise economy.

This fulness of grace that he intends for his priests he has bestowed in part at each successive order received. These orders impose on those who receive them a portion of the priestly duties and introduce them, in some measure, to the functions and the dignity of the priesthood. Likewise, according to the laws of a divine progress, each of them confers a special grace of sanctification, by means of which the young cleric, purified and strengthened from day to day, acquires little by little that state of victim which the priesthood exacts.

Is not this reflection well calculated to give us a great esteem for these orders which are called minor only by comparison but which in reality are important and divine? Should we not determine to make every effort to prepare so as not to lose any of the graces attached to them, graces on which partly depends the success of our future priesthood?

3. *The minor orders make trial of the sacrifice.* Each of them, while giving us a teaching and a grace, imposes certain duties upon us. They not only show us the sacrifice in perspective, as tonsure does, but they make us practice it in part. In minor orders we should possess that love for the Church, that eagerness for the acquisition of sacred science, that zeal for the salvation of souls which stimulates our self-sanctification, that interior and exterior application to the worship of God which the minor orders make us consider in the priest as the different aspects of the great sacrifice that embraces his whole life.

It is the wish of the Church that each of these orders be followed by an interval of time during which the cleric, according to the grace of his ordination, ought, by a partial immolation of himself, to prepare for the more complete immolation that will be required at the priesthood. It is true that these intervals are not always observed in their regular form. But the time of the seminary training replaces them.

The trial of the priestly sacrifice, imposed upon those in minor orders, is nothing more than the faithful observance of the duties prescribed by the rule. It is by submitting generously that the cleric will merit to become a

victim worthy of being offered and sacrificed to God.

What admirable wisdom on the part of the Church! After our sacred engagement at tonsure, she does not immediately subject us to that complete sacrifice which she will one day ask of the priest. She fears that such a trial, without gradual preparation, would discourage us. And she has not wished that at the outset we should make any irrevocable engagement. By a prudent foresight she makes us test our strength in the lower orders of the hierarchy. Thus she tries us in order to know whether she can rely on our future faithfulness. The sacrifice which we see ahead of us is presented to us part by part; and we must pass through its different degrees. Before immolating ourselves with Christ on Calvary, we follow him in the sufferings of the Garden, of the pretorium, and the way of the cross.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

I am resolved to become a devoted and generous priest and to make all the sacrifices for God that the duties of my priestly functions will require of me. But am I equally resolved to submit to these trials of sacrifice that the orders which I receive impose on me?

Strange contradiction! In my dreams of the future, I picture myself as practicing self-denial, labor, sacrifices of every sort that the sacred ministry implies and, far from being alarmed and discouraged, I long for the moment when it will be my privilege to testify my fidelity to God by that service; and it seems to me that nothing will be above my strength. However when there is question of accomplishing much easier duties which are imposed on me now, my good will fails me. I believe myself capable of heroic sacrifice; and the most ordinary sacrifices surpass my powers. I aspire to the practice of priestly self-denial; and I do not know how to suppress a little whim, to restrain a useless word, to mortify a curiosity, to conform to the prescriptions of the rule. I wish to be a good priest; and I lack the courage to be a good seminarian.

My God, deign to rid me of this error. Make me understand that if, in the course of my preparation, I am not a truly virtuous cleric, I will later on be only a mediocre priest. Above all, strengthen the weakness of my will so that, faithful now in the little things thou dost ask of me, I may later on be faithful in the great things.

I resolve:

1. To study the teachings of the Pontifical;
2. To prepare properly for the minor orders so as to receive the abundance of grace which they bestow;
3. To cultivate with special care the virtues proper to these orders.

*They shall go from virtue to virtue.*¹

¹ Ps. 83⁸

VII

MAJOR ORDERS

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Savior crowning his great sacrifice by immolation on the cross. Having reflected upon the circumstances of this immolation, we will adore the dispositions of his soul. And we will contemplate the Mother of Sorrows at the foot of the cross.

II. These words of the bishop when he ordains a subdeacon: *Castitatem, Deo juvante, servare oportebit*, and these others: *In Ecclesiæ ministerio semper esse mancipatum*, express the double effect of his self-immolation.

1. *Separation from the world.* Chastity in the widest sense of the word becomes for him a rigorous law. He takes a sacred and inviolable engagement to forego what for others would be legitimate. The law which the Church imposes on those entering major orders is both holy and severe.

2. *Consecration to God.* The subdeacon is devoted irrevocably to the service of God and the Church. By contracting this perpetual service, he abdicates his liberty. But, what a privileged dependence, what a glorious service!

II. As subdeacons we are victims voluntarily immolated for the glory of God. We will renew our

choice between God and the world. Since, to remain faithful to our promises, we have need of God's help, we will pray to our Saviour that he may never permit us to fall from the rank of honor to which he has raised us.

We will resolve:

1. To preserve the treasure of chastity with great care, avoiding occasions that might stain it;
2. To recite the breviary piously and attentively.

Castitatem, Deo juvante, servare oportebit; atque in Ecclesiæ ministerio semper esse mancipatum.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Savior Jesus Christ crowning his great sacrifice by immolation on the cross. He has reached Calvary's summit. They strip him of his vestments and fasten him to the cross where for three hours he will endure the insults, the blasphemies, and the curses of his enemies. They give him gall and vinegar to drink. Then it is this august and adorable victim, after praying for those who crucified him and confiding his soul to his heavenly Father, uttered a great cry, and expired.

Thus was offered to God the greatest and holiest sacrifice that had ever been or ever could be, the one sacrifice of which all others were only the figure and pale representation.

Having gazed lovingly upon the circumstances of our Savior's immolation, let us look into his soul, and adore the dispositions with which he accomplished it. Let us consider his holy soul as gathering into itself the adorations, thanksgiving, expiation, and prayers of heaven and earth, and offering them to God with his outpoured blood.

At the same time that Christ is immolated on the cross, Mary his mother, so closely united to his mysteries, suffers too at the foot of the cross. She enters into the thoughts of her divine Son and joins in the religious acts that he renders to God. And she generously offers herself, making one and the same victim with him. It is the fulfillment and realization of the divine mystery of his Presentation in the Temple. Let us honor this Mother of Sorrows. And since we are called, like her, to immolate ourselves with Christ, let us pray that we may participate in her dispositions.

My God, thou wast pleased with the double sacrifice offered on Calvary by Jesus and Mary. Deign to accept in like manner that which we offer in consecrating ourselves to thee: *Sic fiat sacrificium nostrum in conspectu tuo hodie ut placeat tibi.*¹

¹ DAN. 3⁴⁰

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The cleric, a mystical victim presented to God in the ceremony of tonsure, prepared by the reception of minor orders, at last, in receiving major orders, undergoes the immolation which he had in perspective and to which he freely submits.

The sacrificial stroke always had two effects; on the one hand, by taking the life of the victim, it destroyed the bond uniting it to creatures; on the other hand, and even by this very separation, made it enter the domain of God, consecrating it irrevocably to him.

Of the same sort is the double effect produced in the subdeacon when he receives that sacred order. This is concisely expressed in the words of the bishop at the moment of ordaining the subdeacon: *Castitatem, Deo juvante, servare oportebit*, that is the separation and death to the world; *atque in Ecclesiæ ministerio semper esse mancipatum*,² that is the consecration to God and his divine service: a double irrevocable engagement which the subdeacon contracts and by which the immolation of the victim is accomplished in him.

² PONT. ROM.

1. *Separation from the world.* The natural life by which we are in relation with the exterior world is summed up in the pursuit of pleasure: pleasure of the heart, the end of all our affections; pleasure of the senses, the end of all our instincts. It finds the most complete and energetic expression in a passion which dominates all others, the most irrepressible, the most universal, the most violent; a passion connected with one of the most fundamental laws of human society and which, by the excesses to which it goes, is the cause of most numerous sins in the world.

The cleric who is admitted to sacred orders ought to offer to God the sacrifice of this passion; that is the first part of his immolation. Not only must he absolutely renounce whatever, in this matter, would be a crime in a man of the world. His sacrifice is more complete and universal. For he takes the most sacred and inviolable engagement to forego what for others would be legitimate. He places thorns about his heart and imposes severe restraints on his senses. Chastity, in the widest sense of the word, becomes for him a rigorous law that will bind till the end of his life without dispensation or diminution: *Castitatem servare oportebit.*

He will be chaste in his body which he will preserve from stain; in his looks which he will turn away from every dangerous object; in his word which will never give expression to what is not pure and holy; in his desires which will not seek the things of earth; in his thoughts, which he will not voluntarily turn to things that he should not love. Thus he will live on earth the life of the angels, or rather a life still more perfect. For, according to St. John Chrysostom, what the angels do in heaven without struggle or effort and consequently without merit, freed as they are from the flesh and things of the senses, he does in resisting the most deceitful seductions, the most subtle inclinations of his earthly nature, and the most legitimate aspirations.

Such is the law which the Church imposes on her ministers. A holy law it is on which depend the honor and the purity of the priesthood. A rigorous law, however, so rigorous that the world, incapable of understanding a sacrifice of this sort, finds it excessive and often refuses to believe in its genuineness and sincerity.

The sacred minister, bound by this divine engagement, is truly an immolated victim. The announcement of death made to him when he

received tonsure and symbolized by the distinctive dress he has worn since then, is at last verified. He is dead to the world whose joys he foregoes; he is dead to concupiscence which he should stifle even in its slightest movements.

If, humanly speaking, this death is hard, as it must be if it is to be a sacrifice, yet how beautiful it is, how devoutly to be longed for, how sweet for the soul animated and inspired by God's grace! With what cheerfulness, therefore, with what eagerness the subdeacon submits to it! When the stroke has fallen and the immolation is accomplished, he rejoices the more to receive these new bonds which, in separating him from the world, have given him true liberty. *Our soul hath been delivered as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken, and we are delivered.*¹

2. *Consecration to God.* At the same time that, by the obligation of continence, the subdeacon renounces the life of the senses, he devotes himself irrevocably to God and the Church: *Atque in Ecclesiæ ministerio semper esse mancipatum.*²

It is the abdication of his liberty, it is a perpetual service that he has contracted. Here-

¹ Ps., 123⁷

² PONT. ROM.

tofore, occupied with lesser functions in the Church's service and under the rule of the clerical life, he has been free to withdraw at his pleasure and to follow a career in the world. To-day he can no longer do so. He is bound by the words of the promise he has made, a contract that may not be broken.

The bishop, having received his promise, first blesses him, then sanctifies him, and lastly consecrates him, by this triple formula irrevocably binding him to the service of the altar. For this reason the subdiaconate is called a sacred order because it consecrates him who has received it, and devotes him to God.

Of all the degrees of sanctification that the Church can confer on things and persons, consecration is the highest. She employs it exclusively for that which is devoted to the worship of God. So she consecrates the vessels of the sacrifice, the altar where it is offered, the temple in which it takes place. But this consecration that makes chalices, altars, and churches so holy and venerable that to use them for common purposes is a sacrilege, is far inferior to the consecration which the Church gives to her ministers. By virtue of their consecration, they no longer belong to themselves but have become men of God. Withdrawn from the midst of things temporal, they should devote

themselves entirely to the sacred ministry confided to them. We may say of them what the apostle said of the risen Christ: *he liveth unto God*.¹

Hence the sacred ministers can, in a complete and true sense, be called immolated victims. In them, as in the sacrificial victim, all is holy and divine; all of God and to God; the body and its organs, the soul and its faculties, in a word the entire person.

What a privileged dependence, what a glorious service above all the dignities of earth! If to belong to God is a sublime glory: *gloria magna est sequi Dominum*, if it is royal to be in the service of so great a Master: *Deus cui servire regnare est*, how glorious then is the privilege of him who belongs to God in so absolute and irrevocable a manner?

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

If I am already a subdeacon, then am I a victim voluntarily immolated for the glory of God. And I renew my choice between God and the world, between the holy joys of chastity and the allurements of sensual satisfactions.

But, dear Lord, I have need of thy help to remain faithful to these promises. For, in vow-

¹ ROM., 6¹⁰

ing myself to thee to lead on earth the life of the angels in heaven, I have not lost my human nature. The passions and weakness that are its lot I carry within me; and, if thou shouldst not sustain and strengthen me, I would fall wretchedly from the rank of honor to which thou hast raised me. But thou wilt not permit it, my Jesus. It is in following the inspirations of thy grace that I have taken the engagement which consecrates me irrevocably to thee; it will be likewise thy grace that will aid me to remain faithful. The prayer of the breviary, which I recite daily, will make this grace abound in my heart and will support my perseverance.

I resolve:

1. To preserve the treasure of chastity with great care, avoiding occasions that might stain it;
2. To recite the breviary piously and attentively.

*Mortui estis et vita vestra est abscondita cum Christo in Deo.*¹

*Castitatem, Deo juvante, servare oportebit; atque in Ecclesiæ ministerio semper esse mancipatum.*²

¹ COLOSS., 3³

² PONT. ROM.

VIII

THE PRIESTHOOD

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our Lord in the glorious life by which he continues his sacrifice on the altar and in heaven, always making intercession for us. And we will thank him for willing that his priests take part in the glorious consummation of his sacrifice.
- II. In ancient sacrifices the victim was sometimes consumed by the flames; and sometimes it served as nourishment for priests and people. Every sacrifice produces these two effects: it renders homage to God and it sanctifies the souls of men. We will consider the priesthood as having these two effects.
1. *The priest is consumed to the glory of God*, by the accomplishment of the great duties of religion. He is set aside for the purpose of offering to God, in the name of his brethern, these sacred duties of religion.
2. *The priest is also a peace offering*, producing and fortifying the life of grace in the souls of the faithful. His study and his piety should be for this exclusive purpose. He belongs to them and should give himself to them.
- III. The state and life of a consummated victim supposes in the priest a profound spirit of religion towards God and boundless love for souls. We

will ask ourselves how we are disposed at present: whether we have a deep conviction of God's greatness; and whether we have a great desire to spend ourselves for immortal souls. We will ask Christ to bestow the priestly spirit upon us.

We will resolve:

1. To fulfill our religious duties most faithfully;
2. To interest ourselves in whatever concerns the sanctification of men's souls.

I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord in the glorious life by which, after his painful immolation on the cross, he continues his sacrifice on the altar and in heaven. He presents himself to us as a consummated victim. In this state everything in him is heavenly and divine. The suffering and anguish have disappeared from his soul, and his body, stripped of its mortality, no longer has the infirmities of the flesh but is clothed in glory and surrounded with incomparable splendor.

Having attained to this last state of his sacrifice, he exercises his mediation in all fulness, rendering to God in a perfect manner the homage of religion; adoring him, thanking him, praising him, blessing him. The least act of

his heart glorifies God more than the united homage of all creatures. He asks for grace, intercedes for us, and his prayer is never rejected. It is not only for himself that he obtains the treasures of the divine life. He opens his hands and abundantly communicates the gifts that he receives, pouring himself forth upon the blessed to give them a share in his glory. And he sends on the earth his Spirit through whom he enlightens, consoles, and sanctifies our souls. So his life expands and, reaching out to all the saints, forms a mystical body, which is the Church.

Such are the divine characteristics of Jesus, the consummated and glorified victim. What do we know more beautiful and holy in heaven or on earth? Let us join with the angels and the blessed concerting hymns of praise and glory to the lamb that is slain, infinitely worthy to receive the homage and benediction of the entire creation. Let us acknowledge that to him we owe all the blessings we receive.

Above all let us thank the Word incarnate, the infinite victim, for willing that we take part in the glorious consummation of his sacrifice. He has made us pass through the various phases of the sacrifice in the different orders we have received. The priesthood, which

crowns them all, initiates us to the last in so far as is possible to the weakness of our present state.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

In ancient sacrifices, the consummation of the victim that followed its immolation was accomplished in two ways: sometimes the victim was devoured by the flames; sometimes, divided into parts, it served as nourishment for priests and people. This is a striking expression of the double end for which every sacrifice is offered and of the double fruit that it produces.

The victim immolated renders to God the homages due to him and sends up to his throne the adorations, praise, petition, blessing, and thanksgiving, symbolized by the flames and smoke which rise from the altar and ascend to the heavens. After honoring God, the victim has the power of sanctifying the souls of men by being united to them; this is figured by the eating.

Christ, the spotless victim, eminently accomplishes this double end. Such is also the consummation of the august sacrifice that we offer to God in our ordination, the last phase of which is the priesthood. In tonsure we are

offered as victims, in minor orders we are tried and prepared for the immolation, in the subdiaconate immolated, and in the priesthood the sacrifice is consummated.

1. In the first place it is necessary that the priest as a holocaust, after the example of Christ, be consummated to the glory of God by the accomplishment of the great duties of religion. By his very state he is vowed to the divine worship. Every man, every Christian has the obligation of rendering homage to God; but for the priest, not only is it a duty, it is his employment, his profession. He is bound to this obligation as the magistrate is to administer justice, as a soldier is to defend his country, as a physician to treat the maladies submitted to him.

God wills to be glorified by all creation, the work of his hands. But among created beings that compose the world it is only man who, being a rational creature, can fulfill this obligation. Yet man often fails to do so or does it but ill. Absorbed by the material cares of life, he often gives only a feeble attention to religion.

Therefore exists the institution of the priesthood, a society of men chosen from other men and especially devoted to offer to God, in the

name of their brethern, the sacred duties of religion. This is the notion which St. Paul gives us of the priest. *Every high priest taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins.*¹ This idea of the priesthood, fully realized in Christ, ought also to find its realization in all those who are called to participate in his priesthood. Jesus honors God in the name of entire humanity, and priests, associated with him, are his representatives on earth in the accomplishment of this important duty.

The virtue of religion in a priest, therefore, differs from that of the simple faithful by a special characteristic. Not only must it be more perfect but it must embrace in its universality, like that of Christ, the religion of the whole Church, of which a priest is the delegated minister. A grand and beautiful thought this is, disclosing the eminence of the priestly dignity, showing us what esteem a priest ought to have for his religious duties and with what interior and exterior respect he should acquit himself of them.

Whereas other men devote themselves to

¹ HEB., 5¹

the common cares of life, he has received the glorious mission of adoring, blessing, and praising the Creator. Par excellence he is the man of prayer and should, therefore, be penetrated with the spirit of religion, disengaged from the life of the senses, absorbed in the worship of God.

This is a priest's first duty. Consequently he will love above all his exercises of piety: meditation, mass, the breviary, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and he will never fail to apply himself most earnestly to these. Whatever belongs to religion will be an object of veneration and love for him.

2. The priest is also a peace-offering by virtue of which he should be for the faithful a spiritual nourishment, producing and fortifying the life of grace in them. Having been raised to the heights of heaven, having joined with the angels in glorifying the Creator, he descends to earth to minister unto the spiritual needs of his brethern. He belongs to them as the sacrificial victim belonged to those who had offered it. Every moment of his time not consecrated to God belongs to them. He is priest not for himself but for their souls.

If he devotes himself to study and adorns his mind with greater learning it is to be better

prepared for instructing the ignorant and to let them share the treasures of science that he possesses. If he practices Christian virtues and grows in holiness, it is to have the grace and the light to lead other souls in the same way. If, in his pious intercourse with God, he increases more and more the fire of divine love in his heart, it is to communicate it to the souls of men. If he asks grace and enlightenment of God, it is not so much to enrich himself as to be the mediator and to bestow them on his flock.

Thus can the priest say to the faithful in the words of St. Paul: *All things are yours.*¹ He has nothing that does not belong to them. And if he is zealous, he will seize every opportunity of showing it.

Our Savior, to sanctify us, unites himself to us by holy communion. Thus ought it to be, in a certain way, with a priest. Glancing over the different ministrations which his priesthood gives him the right and the duty to exercise, we will see they all contain a sort of mystical communion in virtue of which he gives himself to men's souls, communicates his life to them, passes into them, so to speak, to

¹ I COR., 3²²

purify and sanctify them. This communication is always remarkably efficacious.

Just as the prayer of the priest is in itself more powerful than any other prayer by reason of the state of sacrificial victim to which he is reduced, so too his ministrations, by which he communicates himself, have a force and power which no other action possesses by the same title. His word, like the word of God, is living, efficacious, enlightening; it penetrates souls, transforms them, converts them.

Let us add that this efficacy is by no means in proportion to the degree of knowledge he may possess nor the eloquence with which he may be endowed. Whoever has studied the action of God in the souls of men under the influence of priestly ministration knows that such a proportion does not exist. How many times has not the simple and artless word of a good priest had more power and been marked by more astonishing effects than the word of an eloquent and learned orator? It is to the grace of his priesthood, to his state of victim immolated for God's glory, that the priest especially owes his power over souls. *He hath placed in us the word of reconciliation. For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God as it*

*were exhorting by us.*¹ And one may say of him what the gospel says of Christ: *Virtue went out from him.*²

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The state and life of a consummated victim suppose in the priest a double disposition which is the résumé of all his sacerdotal duties: namely a profound spirit of religion towards God and boundless love for souls. I wish to be a priest; hence I must have these two dispositions. They ought to be, when I shall be honored with the priesthood, the inspirations of my life. I can not believe that I am truly called by God to this dignity if, henceforth, I am not animated by these motives.

How am I disposed at present? Have I the virtue of religion, a deep conviction of God's greatness and majesty; am I respectful and recollected in the holy place; have the religious exercises an attractiveness for me; have I love for prayer, for the sacred ceremonies, for all that pertains to the worship of God?

What dispositions do I entertain towards

¹ I COR., 5²⁰

² ST. LUKE, 6¹⁰

the souls of men? Am I affected by the loss of souls? Have I a great desire to spend all my life and strength to procure their sanctification?

Jesus, divine priest, consummated victim, it is from thee I must derive these dispositions. Thou hast placed the germ in my heart. Complete the work which thou hast begun; bestow on me in abundance the priestly spirit which thou dost possess in all fulness. By fidelity to prayer, may I resemble the holocaust consumed by the flames; and, by the exercise of zeal, may I become, like a peace victim, spiritual nourishment unto the souls of men.

I resolve:

1. To fulfill my religious duties most faithfully;
2. To interest myself in whatever concerns the sanctification of men's souls.

I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls.¹

IX

THE SPIRIT OF POVERTY

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our blessed Lord offering, in his own person, the perfect model of poverty. He was born poor indeed, lived in humble poverty, and died poor. We will honor this spirit of poverty in the apostles and other saints of the Church.
- II. The Church does not require of priests the vow of actual poverty imposed on religious. But they must live interiorly detached from created things and must give practical expression to this disinterestedness. We will consider this duty from three points of view.

1. *The recommendation of spiritual authorities.* In the Old Law God especially provided that the priests should not share in the division of the Promised Land. And Our Lord, in outlining the features of an apostolic man, requires the spirit of poverty as its principal characteristic. We see the same teaching in St. Paul's recommendation to Timothy. And history attests with what care the Church has sought to preserve these traditions.

2. *The appreciation of the faithful.* The more that men in the world feel themselves attracted by the allurements of gain, the more do they admire the spirit of poverty in others. Everyone understands and appreciates the sacerdotal spirit of detachment.

Avarice is sure to destroy the confidence and esteem of the faithful.

3. *The very nature of the priesthood.* Love for wealth is intrinsically opposed to the priestly spirit. For avarice debases the thoughts of a priest, chills his zeal, and transforms his sacred ministry into a common trade or industry.

III. We will ask God to keep us from the evil of avarice. *The Lord is the portion of my inheritance*, we have said. We will ask ourselves whether we have already the beginning of an inordinate attachment to money.

We will resolve:

1. To examine our conscience in this matter from time to time.

2. To combat the least attachment to the goods of this world.

Sicut sacerdos et levita, nudus nudum Jesum sequar.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our blessed Lord offering, in his own person, the perfect model of poverty. *Being rich he became poor.*¹ He was born poor indeed, for even the wretched spot where he was laid after his birth did not belong to him. And he remained poor throughout his mortal life. Could he not say: *The son of man hath*

¹ II COR., 8⁹

*not where to lay his head?*¹ And he died poor, for the shroud in which he was buried, the spices and perfumes, the very sepulchre that received his lifeless body, were not his.

In the apostles, who were the first priests of the Church, let us honor the same spirit of poverty. When the divine Master invited them to follow him, their possessions, if we except St. Matthew the publican, were scanty indeed, a boat and some fishing nets. But even this little which they had they left in obedience to the Master's voice summoning them: *Having brought their ships to land, leaving all things, they followed him.*² St. Peter could justly say to Christ: *Behold we have left all things, and have followed thee.*³

The great apostle St. Paul imitated the Savior's poverty no less faithfully. In the midst of the fatigues of the apostolate, he endured hunger and nakedness; he earned his livelihood by the work of his own hands; and he declared that, provided he have clothes to cover him and bread to nourish him, he asks nothing more. *Having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content.*⁴

¹ ST. MATTH., 8²⁰

² ST. LUKE, 5¹¹

³ ST. MATTH., 19²⁷

⁴ I TIM., 6⁸

All holy priests have followed the same rule of conduct: some generously stripping themselves of all their possessions to follow the poverty of Christ; others, even in the midst of abundance, practicing detachment from earthly possessions. We have a well known example in St. Charles Archbishop of Milan. Although he might have enjoyed every comfort and luxury in his palace, yet he led the life of a poor man.

We admire these sturdy examples of Christian poverty. Let us thank our Lord who has given them to us in his own person and in his saints; and let us ask him to fill us more and more with the spirit of poverty, without which we can never be truly good priests.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The Church does not require of priests the effective actual renunciation which the vow of poverty imposes on religious. But, whatever be the condition of earthly fortune which Providence has bestowed on them, they must, if they have the spirit of their priestly state, live interiorly detached from created things and give practical outward expression of this detachment, either by generous sacrifice of the

goods which they possess when charity requires, or by showing themselves not exigent and hard-hearted in the prosecution of their rights. The most reliable spiritual authorities, the appreciation of the faithful, and the very nature of the priesthood make this a duty.

1. *Spiritual authorities.* Among the recommendations Holy Scripture addresses to priests, disinterestedness holds an important place. When God divided the Promised Land among the tribes of Israel, he did not wish that the priestly tribe, devoted to the service of the tabernacle, should share in this division. And the reason that he proclaimed for this is worthy of note. The Lord said to Aaron: *You shall possess nothing in their land, neither shall you have a portion among them: I am thy portion and inheritance in the midst of the children of Israel.*¹

The teaching that is summed up in this prescription becomes more precise in the gospel. Our Lord, giving to his apostles the mission of announcing the kingdom of God, outlined for them the features of an apostolic man. And he especially required, as its principal characteristic, the spirit of poverty. *Do not possess*

¹ NUM., 18²⁰

gold, nor silver, nor money in your purses. . . . Take nothing for your journey; neither staff, nor script, nor bread, nor money.¹ Freely have you received, freely give.²

St. Paul, inspired by these divine lessons, in the same manner traces the rule of life for a true priest, when he writes to his disciple Timothy. He warns him against the examples of those unfaithful ministers who looked for sordid gain in the service of the Church. *Men corrupted in mind, and who are destitute of the truth, supposing gain to be godliness. But godliness with contentment is great gain. . . . For they that will become rich, fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which draw men into destruction and perdition. For the desire of money is the root of all evil. . . . But thou, O man of God, fly these things.³*

History attests with what fidelity the Church has preserved these traditions. She has wished priests to have the necessities of life of which St. Paul speaks and she has striven with motherly solicitude to procure them for her minis-

¹ ST. MATTH., 10³⁻⁹

² ST. LUKE, 6³

³ I TIM., 6³⁻¹¹

ters. But she has not wished that, after the manner of people in the world, they should devote themselves to the preoccupations that follow from the care of temporal things. They should not seek to enrich themselves by business or by lucrative occupations. Even the resources which the Church provides to meet their needs belong to them only in proportion to their necessities; what remains over and above they must use for good works.

With anathema the canons of the councils and the words of the Fathers denounce those priests who, forgetful of these prescriptions, give themselves up to love of money, enriching themselves in the sanctuary, and giving to the world the lamentable scandal of priestly avarice.

2. *The appreciation of the faithful.* To accomplish God's work, the priest has need of a certain degree of consideration of the part of the faithful. And the spirit of disinterestedness is a powerful factor in procuring it.

We know how violently cupidity exercises its empire in the hearts of most men. To enrich themselves, to accumulate ever increasing fortunes, is the great end of life for many of them. That is the motive of their work and all their plans. For that idol they will fatigue

themselves, impair their health, even shorten their lives. And yet, the more they feel themselves drawn by the allurements of gain, the more do they admire the voluntary self-denial of those who, rising to a higher level, renounce these worldly goods, the object of almost universal cupidity. That is why the religious who practices perfect poverty will always have his prestige in the eyes of the people. In the same way, if priests practice disinterestedness, if they manifest no attachment for temporal advantages, if they are charitable and always ready to aid the poor they will enjoy universal esteem.

In the priestly character are to be found virtues that not all are able to appreciate; but there is no one who does not understand and value the sacerdotal spirit of detachment. For most men, it is the characteristic sign of a good priest, of the man of God. When they can say of a priest: "He is charitable; he gives away everything," it is enough. For this reason they are even indulgent in the matter of certain defects which they would otherwise less easily pardon.

If nothing contributes more surely than disinterestedness to procure the esteem and confidence of the people, on the other hand, the

contrary vice is equally certain to destroy their confidence and regard. Some defects can be concealed. But avarice is sure to manifest itself and all efforts to hide it will be in vain. Without difficulty everyone recognizes it in the severity with which an avaricious priest exacts what is his due, in certain mercantile instincts which strive to make money out of everything, in a sordid stinginess, above all in the parsimony of his alms and his hard-heartedness towards the poor.

As soon as the penetrating eyes of the faithful perceive the presence of this fault in a priest, it is at once to the detriment of his supernatural prestige which makes him respected and respectable before all. They will no longer see in him the minister of God, will no longer believe in his words; his ministry, which they will not distinguish from the services of an ordinary man of business in the world, will be sterile.

3. *The nature of the priesthood.* In the severe judgment which the people pronounce upon an avaricious priest, they make no mistake, for this vice is intrinsically opposed to the priestly spirit. Even in a man of the world, excessive love of money is sinful. To all are addressed the words of the psalmist: *If riches abound,*

*set not your heart upon them.*¹ But in a priest this disorder becomes more revolting: it debases his thoughts, chills his zeal, and transforms his sacred ministry into a common trade or industry.

It debases his thoughts. Man of God, minister of prayer, living amidst holy things, led ceaselessly to meditate upon Christian truths, a true priest nourishes his soul with noble, elevated, supernatural thoughts. God, Christ, the Church, immortal souls, sanctifying practices, rules of perfection, such are the objects to which his thoughts preferably turn and which he loves to contemplate.

Altogether otherwise is it with a priest dominated by the interest of money. His thoughts are debased, earthly, entirely concentrated in temporal interests. What occupies him, what is the object of his calculations and projects is lucre and whatever may be connected therewith. As the love of money enslaves his heart, so the thought of money absorbs his mind. That is what interests him most. In him the priestly office has become a calculator of profit and loss.

It chills his zeal. Zeal is nourished by love

¹ Ps., 61¹¹

for God and for souls, or rather it is the very exercise of that love. But in a heart that is under the sway of the passion that we are considering, this double charity is sure to be enfeebled and eventually extinguished. It is quite impossible for it to become strong and generous.

Zeal supposes lofty aspirations; it is, according to our Lord's expression, a burning flame. It implies devotedness and self-forgetfulness. But avarice smothers this divine charity, narrowly and selfishly considering only its own interests and advantage.

It transforms the ministry into a common trade industry. For a priest dominated by such an attachment, what are the sacred functions of his priesthood? Is not the financial recompense his first and principal preoccupation? Does he not value them according to the profit that he hopes to derive therefrom? When the bishop appoints him to a certain parish, such a priest anxiously inquires about the revenues rather than about the state of souls for whose salvation and sanctification he ought to labor. And such is the thought that inspires all the details of his life as a priest.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, permit not that I become an avaricious priest. Rather grant that, aided and sustained by thy grace, I may imitate the worthy examples of disinterestedness in the lives of the apostles and of all holy priests. It is only on this condition that I can be truly thy representative, thy minister, another Christ. Such is the disposition of my heart. In receiving tonsure I said that I was choosing thee as the portion of my inheritance, and my lips did but express the conviction and purpose of my soul. Thee alone, my Savior, I wish to possess on earth; thou art my riches, my only treasure: *Dominus pars*. I abhor the thought of entering the priesthood for the temporal profit that it might procure for me. I would prefer the most wretched misery rather than embrace the priestly state with such motives.

But can I promise myself that I will always remain in these worthy sentiments and that as a priest my heart will never be open to the love of gold? Unlike other evil inclinations, the passion of avarice does not generally manifest itself in youth but rather with later years and even more often in old age.

However, do I discover in myself any symptoms of attachment to money? Have I not sometimes felt a desire to increase my resources and have I not felt pain at separating myself from what I possess? Am I, according to my means, generous and charitable? Or do I betray excessive reserve in regard to almsdeeds?

I ought to combat such tendencies if I find them in me lest the passion of avarice insinuate itself almost without being perceived. It is so easy to deceive one's self by calling wise economy what is really avarice or cupidity.

I resolve:

1. To examine my conscience on this matter from time to time;

2. To combat the least attachment to the goods of this world.

*Sicut sacerdos et levita, nudus nudum Jesum sequar.*¹

¹ ST. JEROME: *Ep. ad Nepot.*

X

CONTINENCE

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord, the model of perfect chastity, who has inspired the Church to impose the law of continence upon her sacred ministers. And she has maintained this treasure not without surmounting many obstacles and enduring severe struggles.

II. We will consider some of the motives which should make us revere this holy law of celibacy.

1. *The priest shares with Christ the august prerogative of mediator between God and man.* The special relations established between God and the priest require in the priest a pure heart disengaged from the grosser satisfactions of the senses. Conjugal chastity would not be perfect enough for him.

2. *The relations that unite a priest to the faithful require celibacy.* To fulfill his lofty role as director of consciences, he must appear to the people as a divine man. Celibacy contributes largely to bring about that religious respect which he should receive. The unique relations of confidence between the faithful and the priest would be profoundly modified if he were married.

3. *As a servant of the Church, the priest needs to be unmarried,* for he needs to be disinterested, inde-

pendent, and devoted; a man of God, superior to all worldly influence, and ready to sacrifice himself to the demands of duty. All this is possible for a celibate priest.

III. We will accept the law of celibacy as a sweet and consoling yoke, freely assumed and cheerfully borne. We will be on our guard against temerarious presumption, relying on prayer and prudence. Through the intercession of Mary Immaculate we will ask for the grace to preserve the flower of our subdiaconate in all spotlessness.

*Virgo singularis,
Inter omnes mitis,
Nos culpis solutos,
Mites fac et castos.*

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord who, after giving us the example of perfect chastity in his own person and that of his holy mother, has inspired the Church to impose the law of continence upon her sacred ministers. At all times, even in paganism, the becomingness of this law has been perceived at least dimly. Men have always believed in a hidden connection between chastity and the priesthood, a relation between disengagement from the life of the senses and application to the sacred functions of prayer and sacrifice. Whence arose various prescrip-

tions of purification imposed upon members of the priesthood in ancient times.

But it was reserved for the Church to present to the world the spectacle of a virgin priesthood; a justly admired institution in which the Church is without rival, of which she is rightly proud, and which she enforces with a jealous care to preserve it unaltered.

To obtain this result and to maintain this treasure of sacerdotal chastity intact, what obstacles has she not had to surmount, what struggles to endure?

The passions arose against this restraint; the law appeared intolerable; from many sides objections were heard; and, though, almost beyond belief, at times the people themselves joined with prevaricating priests to destroy this barrier.

At one time it was almost accomplished. Already the East had in part shaken off the yoke. The West was threatened and, in the presence of the opposition to the ancient discipline, many inclined to favor its moderation. Happily Rome held out against the storm. God, who watched over the honor of the priesthood, raised up holy popes whose unshaken firmness presented an unbreakable barrier to the torrent.

Among the defenders of sacerdotal continence, history places in the first rank the holy pontiff Gregory VII, who made this great object one of the principal ends of his pastoral solicitude. There was stubborn opposition and the victory was disputed for a long time. But at last, to the greater glory of the Church and her priesthood, the holy law of ecclesiastical celibacy issued forth triumphant.

Having inspired the law of celibacy, Jesus Christ, the supreme pontiff and divine head of the Church, has protected it against every assault. Blessed and ever glorified be his name! Let us honor also the noble company of holy bishops, priests, and levites who, following in his steps and sustained by his grace, have been faithful to their promises, have cast at their feet the seductions of the world and the senses and have preserved in all its purity the flower of their chastity. They are our fathers and our examples. May we be courageous and worthy imitators of their virtue!

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Perfect continence, such as the Church imposes on her ministers, is not essential to the priesthood, but is, nevertheless, its flower, its

ornament, its aureole. It is a most fit characteristic. Without it the priesthood would continue to exist, but would lose a considerable part of its prestige. Let us consider some of the motives that should make us revere this holy law of celibacy.

1. *The priest shares with Christ the august prerogative of mediator between God and man.* Like the divine Master and with him he offers sacrifice; he is his voice in the world through the great duty of prayer. Like the Master he ought to be pure and holy, and it is becoming that like him he be a virgin priest.

It is remarkable that it is principally on this ground that the holy canons prescribe celibacy for priests and the Fathers recommend it. For example, the Second Council of Carthage decreed that it was becoming that the holy bishops and priests of God as also the levites who serve the divine sacraments should be continent; it is pleasing to all that bishops, priests, deacons, or those who have contact with the sacraments, being guardians of modesty, should also abstain from having wives.

Indeed the special relations established between God and the priest by the sacred functions of the priesthood and especially the holy sacrifice, require in the priest a pure heart

altogether disengaged from the grosser satisfactions of the senses, a soul completely spiritual and, according to the expression of a pious author, animating the body without contact with it, like an object suspended in a vase but not touching the sides thereof. To treat with God, who is holiness itself, to approach him, to offer up the spotless victim, it is first of all necessary to be holy.

This is the principal reason why the Church wishes the priest to live in celibacy. Conjugal chastity would not be perfect enough for him. Doubtless, marriage, raised by our Lord to the dignity of a sacrament, is holy. But virginity, which elevates us above carnal satisfactions that would subject us to their sway, is, as the Church has solemnly defined in the Council of Trent, still more holy. It is a pious practice among the faithful to prepare themselves in the same manner for the participation in the holy mysteries. And St. Paul insinuates the fitness of this practice.

How becoming it is, therefore, that the priests of the New Law, continually applying themselves to heavenly duties, called each day to take part in the most sublime mysteries, should be entirely continent.

2. *The relations that unite a priest to the faith-*

ful require celibacy. The priesthood has given him a divine authority over souls. As director of consciences, he is the depositary of the most private secrets, and his duties in this capacity have a delicacy that nothing else approaches.

To fulfill this lofty role, he must appear to the people as a divine man. The respect to which his priesthood gives him a right, does not resemble that which is accorded an honorable and virtuous man of the world, for example, a righteous magistrate. It has a religious character and participates, in a certain way, in the respect offered to God, to the saints, and to objects set apart from profane use by a special consecration.

Celibacy contributes largely to bring about this respect. It is like a divine seal on the priest's brow, commanding the respect of all. Perhaps he is still young; just yesterday he was consecrated a priest of God. But he stands in the world with a virgin's crown, a diadem that makes him more respected by all than the white hair of old age. Strip him of this crown and you take him down from the pedestal on which the Church has placed him, you bring him from heaven to earth, you make him like unto other men. Deprived of his heroism, his virtue is reduced to ordinary and most commonplace proportions.

This mediocrity will appear still more striking if we regard this priest, who has no longer the aureole of perfect chastity, in the minute details of family life to which he will be reduced, in the solidarity necessarily established between himself and his family which is an extension of himself.

A moment's reflection suffices to understand that the unique relations between the faithful and the priest would be profoundly modified if he were married. In particular, confession would become almost impossible.

3. *As servant of the Church* to which he has given himself and which he should serve with a perfect self-abnegation and self-forgetfulness, *the priest needs to be unmarried.* To fulfill his duties towards the Church, he should be disinterested, independent, and devoted.

Disinterestedness. Having taken God for the portion of his inheritance, he ought to be a stranger to all the calculations of cupidity and without any attachment to the goods of this life.

Independence. As a man of duty and of conscience, in the accomplishment of his ministry, in the pulpit, the tribunal of penance, at the bedside of the sick, he must show himself superior to all worldly influences, so that

no human power should be able to divert him from the path of justice and duty.

Devotedness. He is not a priest for himself. His life, his time, do not belong to him. For he must be ready to sacrifice them to the demands of duty.

All this is possible, we may even say easy, for a celibate priest. Alone on the earth, without family bonds, he will be, thanks to that providential isolation which the Church has imposed on him, capable of the heroic self-sacrifice required of him. But suppress the salutary law of celibacy, give the priest a wife and children; will it not at once be far otherwise?

If the priest is alone, the augmenting of his fortune would be inexcusable; if, however, he has a family, who can forbid him to establish a fortune for them to create resources for his children, and consequently to exercise Christian charity with niggardly reserve?

If the priest is alone, he can exercise his ministry with a noble independence. But if he must watch over the interests of his family and provide necessary protection for them, will he always have the courage of priestly duty?

If the priest is alone, he will be capable, if needs be, of exposing even his life to danger.

On the contrary, if his life is necessary to the family which he has brought into the world, will he not recoil before such a sacrifice?

Thus, from whatever point of view we regard the matter, we are constrained to acknowledge that, in imposing continency on the priesthood, the Church has been most wise. Divinely enlightened on the holiness of the Christian priesthood and the august character of its ministry, she has wished her priests to live on earth like the pure spirits, whose image they are, live in heaven. This lofty inspiration has cast over the priesthood an incomparable splendor, has made it respected even by its enemies, and has given it an indubitable superiority over all other priesthoods.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Far from being a painful restraint, the holy law of celibacy will be for me a sweet and consoling yoke. By my free choice I have accepted it and I will carry it cheerfully, supported, my Savior, by thy grace which will never be wanting.

Nevertheless I will be on guard against temerarious presumption which would seek to persuade me that I have nothing to fear in regard

to my purity. But it suffices for me to question my own heart in order to understand that, even after the sacred engagements of the subdiaconate, I am capable of every weakness. I will, therefore, watch over my chastity as one guards a precious treasure; and I will make use of whatever means divine Providence has placed in my power to preserve it intact.

The first is prayer. When imposing the obligation of a chaste life, the Church placed the breviary in my hands that I might understand that if, on the one hand, purity of heart was to prepare me to fulfill worthily the ministry of prayer, on the other hand, prayer itself, assuring me of God's help, would safeguard that purity.

Another means I find in the precautions laid down by the canons of holy Church and recommended by prudence. The sort of life that the Church imposes on a priest, while keeping him in the world, yet separates him from it. A life of retreat, recollection, and study which, however, shall be consistent with the duties and efficacy of his ministry: forbidding dangerous visiting, vain curiosity, profane amusements. A priest who remains faithful to these rules will find therein a powerful preservative against the perils to which his virtue would be

exposed should he neglect them. This double resolution will be the fruit of this meditation.

Mary Immaculate, most pure mother of the Incarnate Word, obtain for me from thy divine Son, to whose service I have consecrated myself, the grace to preserve in its spotlessness the flower of my subdiaconate. Until death may I be pure and chaste as thou wert, so that the Church may have in me a minister less unworthy of the sublime mysteries confided to me.

*Virgo singularis,
Inter omnes mitis,
Nos culpis solutos,
Mites fac et castos.*¹

¹ HYMN TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

XI

THE PRIEST AT THE ALTAR

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our Savior offering his august sacrifice. It is mystically continued in heaven and on the altar. We are among those to be honored with the lofty office of offering this same sacrifice. To express our gratitude less unworthily, we will join our voice to that of the apostles and all holy priests.
- II. We will consider that every time a priest says mass, our Savior renews three things implied in our redemption.

1. *Jesus becomes incarnate.* He becomes really present on the altar. The bread and wine are changed into his body and blood. And this priestly prerogative of consecrating will be renewed every every day of the priest's life.

2. *Jesus is offered in sacrifice.* The Eucharist was instituted to renew the sacrifice of Calvary. The priest at the altar is really the minister of the sacrifice. And this sacrifice is an act than which there never has been and never will be anything more sublime in heaven or on earth.

3. *Jesus sanctifies us by the merits of his sacrifice.* The august victim belongs, in a certain sense, to the priest. Hence his great privilege of communicating to men the fruit of the sacrifice, of directing

this outpouring of grace. This he accomplishes by the intentions at mass and by the administration of the sacraments.

III. We will recall the pregnant words of the Church in the ordination of priests: *Agnoscite quod agitis*. We will ask our Savior to impress upon us a true idea of the august act of the priest at the altar.

We will resolve:

1. During our preparation for the priesthood, to meditate often on the sacred ministry of the altar;

2. To prepare to say mass well by now assisting thereat attentively and devoutly.

Agnoscite quod agitis.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord, the eternal Pontiff, offering to God the august and holy sacrifice by which all sanctification is accomplished. Offered figuratively from the beginning of the world, then in a real and bloody manner on Calvary, this divine sacrifice is now mystically continued in heaven and on the altar: in heaven, where Jesus, the immolated victim, offers to God in our behalf the merits of his suffering and death; on the altar, where by the ministry of priests, he ceaselessly renews his sacrifice; and he will continue to do so as long as the world lasts, thus fulfilling the promise that

he made to the apostles before leaving them: *I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.*¹

My Savior, I am one of those whom thou deignest to honor with this lofty office for which even the angels are not worthy. The day is not far away when I will be permitted to ascend to the altar, and there consecrate thy adorable body and precious blood. This is truly a special grace that will crown the numberless acts of thy mercy and goodness in my regard.

Unable to express my gratitude worthily, I join my voice to that of the holy apostles, the first to be honored with thy divine priesthood whose happiness it was to hear from thy own lips the precious words conferring on them the unspeakable power which thou didst exercise in their presence: *Do this for a commemoration of me.*² I join in the thanksgiving, in the acts of love, in the praise and blessing which the thought of this great prerogative arouses in the souls of all holy priests. With them I thank thee, my Savior, I bless thee, and I will always remember thy mercies. *What shall I*

¹ St. MATT., 28²⁰

² St. LUKE, 22¹⁹

*render to the Lord, for all the things that he hath rendered to me?*¹ *The mercies of the Lord I will sing for ever.*²

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Of all the functions of the priestly life, the most awful and august, but also the most consoling, is doubtless that which we exercise at the altar. It is especially there that the priest is another Christ, there that our Savior, through his minister, renews the marvelous work of our redemption.

To redeem us Christ did three things: he was made man, he sacrificed himself and merited for us the grace by which we are sanctified. And these he renews every time a priest says mass.

1. *Jesus becomes incarnate.* Indeed he becomes present on the altar at the word of the priest as he became present in the womb of Mary when she gave her consent to the word of the angel. The priest pronounces a few mysterious words, and at once the bread that he holds in his hands is the body of Christ; the wine in the chalice is no longer wine, but the

¹ Ps., 115¹²

² Ps., 88²

blood of the Redeemer poured forth for us on the cross. The creative act by which God brought this world into existence out of nothing, the numerous prodigies that filled the earthly life of our Savior, without even excluding the miracle of his resurrection and glorious ascension, are more comprehensible. Justly does the Church call the consecration the *mysterium fidei*.

It would be a great wonder if, by means of a few consecrating words, each priest could perform this miracle once in his life. But his privilege is more extended. To-day he is ordained priest; to-morrow he will ascend the holy altar and, in a transport of joy that words are powerless to describe, will consecrate the host that he holds in his trembling hands. The next day he will enjoy the same happy prerogative, which will be renewed every day of his life.

In the face of such a privilege, we can understand the enthusiastic expressions with which the Fathers exalt the dignity of the priesthood. To them, the priest is above kings and emperors, above even the principalities of heaven; he can be compared only with the blessed Mother of the Word incarnate. This is what leads Father Olier to say that God has per-

formed two great prodigies in the Church: the Blessed Virgin and the Priest.

2. *Jesus is offered in sacrifice.* It is to renew the sacrifice of Calvary in our midst that Christ instituted the Eucharist. As faith teaches us, the mass is the unbloody reproduction of that great immolation by which Christ saved us. On the altar he offers himself by the ministry of the priest. The priest at the altar, therefore, really offers sacrifice and the victim that he immolates and offers to God, is Jesus Christ the divine Redeemer. The priest is thus associated with the most sublime act of Christ, the sovereign priest; he coöperates in his immolation; he is priest and sacrificer with him and by him. When we celebrate we do what Mary did at the foot of the cross, offering her divine Son to the heavenly Father as a sacrifice of praise and expiation.

The sacrifice of the cross, renewed on the altar by the hands of the priest, is an act than which there never has been and never will be anything more sublime in heaven or on earth. Not only does it surpass the religious acts by which, before the coming of the Messias, men were wont to pay homage to the Creator, but it is the very culminating point in the life of our Savior.

His earthly life was its preparation; for he had it always in view; it is the baptism with which he desired to be baptized, a chalice which he longed to drink, the pasch for which he sighed.

His heavenly life is its development. Jesus, immolated on Calvary, will be eternally the victim of God; on his body he bears the stigmata of the immolation; and it is by the merits of this sacrifice unceasingly offered to God that grace continues to flow upon us.

Such is the divine act with which the priest coöperates when he celebrates mass. Christ, the invisible priest is hidden in him, acts by his hands, speaks by his lips. Just as, at the altar, there is only one victim, so there is only one priest; this priest is Christ living in his minister, associating him to his priesthood, identifying his action with that of his minister, whom he causes to share in his religious act, making of his own sacrifice and that offered by the priest one and the same sacrifice.

How lofty is the greatness of the priesthood; we can rightly cry out with a holy doctor of the Church: *O veneranda sacerdotum dignitas!*

3. *Jesus sanctifies us by the merits of his sacrifice.* The august victim whom the priest has, in a certain sense, created by his word and

whom he offers to God, becomes his, so that he has a right to dispose of it. Hence the sublime privilege accorded to priests of sanctifying the souls of men by communicating to them the fruits of the sacrifice. It is from the Eucharistic host that all grace comes; it is the fire from which light and heat spread to all parts of the Church. In fact, Jesus, the immolated and consummated victim, continually raises to God the voice of his prayer, a prayer always heard by God, always effective. By the supreme efficacy of this prayer, the streams of grace descend upon the earth making it fertile in meritorious good works.

The priest has the right to direct this outpouring of grace. And he does so by the intentions which he forms at the sacrifice itself, whether for the living or in behalf of the dead. These intentions, like the prayer of Christ on which they depend, always produce their fruit. The faithful knowing this attach a great importance to the intentions of the priest saying mass, and they seek to have them directed in their own behalf or for their dead.

The priest also accomplishes this purpose when he administers the sacraments, mysterious channels of grace which he has the right to open and close, by which grace is communicated to souls.

Thus the prerogative that the minister of Jesus Christ exercises at the altar is the foundation and the living centre of all those which he possesses. It is by this and this alone that he is a priest.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The Church, in the ordination of priests, addresses these pregnant words to them: *Agnosce quod agitis*. It is as if she said to them: "What you do when you ascend the altar of God is an act sublime; understand it well and believe that you are performing a ministry for which even the angels are not worthy."

My Savior, deign to impress the practical appreciation of this truth deep in my heart; there would be need of nothing more to make me a holy priest. Indeed if this truth penetrates my soul, if I have a true idea of the divine act which the priest performs in the holy sacrifice, I will always accomplish this duty in a profoundly religious spirit, with a pure heart, and ardent love.

I will make my preparation with great care, and with exactness will carry out the venerable rites instituted by the Church. I purpose never to neglect my thanksgiving after the holy sacri-

fice. The mass will be the centre of my priestly life as also the source of my powers and my consolation. I will try always to say mass well.

I resolve:

1. During my preparation for the priesthood, to meditate often on the sacred ministry of the altar;

2. To prepare to say mass well by now assisting thereat attentively and devoutly.

*Agnosce quod agitis.*¹

¹ PONT. ROM.

XII

THE PRIEST IN THE TRIBUNAL OF PENANCE

SUMMARY

I We will adore in Christ the office of mediator between heaven and earth and conqueror of sin. He is the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world: and our justification is accomplished through his merits. We will thank our Savior for having called us to participate in the power of binding and loosing men's consciences, to be the dispensers of his merits.

II. We will consider the priest in the tribunal of penance as the confidant, the counsellor, and the judge of souls.

1. *The priest as the confident of souls.* The penitent exposes the most hidden secrets of his conscience. The priest should therefore be animated by a compassionate charity, a profound humility, and perfect purity.

2. *The priest as the counsellor of souls.* In hardened hearts he must arouse the spirit of repentance and love for God. To weak souls he must point out the precautions necessary to avoid sin. And there will be some chosen souls whom he must introduce to the principles and maxims of the perfect life.

3. *The priest as the judge of souls.* He must pronounce a sentence that is ratified in heaven. Herein is a sublime but awful prerogative. Would he not be guilty of a great sin if he should absolve without discernment, pronouncing a sentence that God would not approve?

We will ask ourselves whether we are striving to acquire the three conditions especially necessary for a faithful confessor? They are knowledge, holiness, and perfect independence.

III. We will resolve

1. To increase our love for souls, to whose sanctification we must consecrate our lives;

2. To conceive a great horror for sin;

3. During our seminary life, to work hard to acquire a knowledge of moral theology and a spirit of piety, both of which will help us to become good confessors.

Ars artium regimen animarum.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore in Christ the office of reconciler between heaven and earth: *For God indeed was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.*¹ The great obstacle to this reconciliation was sin: *Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sin of the world.*² It is, then,

¹ II COR., 5¹⁹

² ST. JOHN, 1²⁹

he who has thrown down the wall by which we were separated from God and who has regained for us the peace that we lost by our revolt. Such has been the fruit of the blood that he poured forth, of the death that he suffered for us.

No justification can regenerate our souls except by the merits of that blood and that death. But, that it may be applied to our souls, Christ has chosen to make use of intermediaries. He has given to his apostles and in their person to all priests the divine power of forgiving sins. *Receive ye the Holy Ghost, he said to them, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.*¹ Thus was instituted the adorable sacrament of reconciliation, a sort of second baptism destined to restore to our souls the grace of the first, when we have had the misfortune of losing it.

Whereas the first baptism can be conferred by all men without distinction, the second can be only by priests, who alone have received from Christ the power of binding and loosing man's conscience. Therein we see one of the most glorious prerogatives of our priesthood.

¹ St. JOHN, 20²²⁻²³

Let us thank our Savior who, in his goodness, has deigned to call us to participate in this great power, making us the dispensers of his merits, confiding to our care immortal souls that he redeemed by his blood, that are more precious to him than all the rest of creation. Let us learn to value such a prerogative as we should and to acquit ourselves worthily of the sacred duty that it imposes on us, striving, in the holy tribunal to be what Christ himself would be there, whose representatives we are.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

After the ministry of the altar, undoubtedly the divinest of a priest's duties is the ministry that he fulfills in the tribunal of penance. It consists of three things: hearing the confessions of his penitents, instructing them according to their needs, and pronouncing upon them, if they are worthy, the formula of absolution. The priest is, therefore, the confidant, the counsellor, and the judge of souls.

1. *The priest as the confidant of souls.* At the feet of his confessor, the penitent admits him to the most hidden secrets of his conscience. He avows his weaknesses, perhaps numerous and grievous, all the sins into which he has

had the misfortune of falling, and lays bare all the wounds of his soul in order that, by virtue of the power which God confers on his minister, he may receive pardon.

That the priest conduct himself in a manner worthy of the high ministry that he exercises when he receives the confidence of the penitent, he should be animated by holy, supernatural dispositions.

In the first place he should have a compassionate charity, the disposition that should dominate all others in the heart of a confessor. He sees before him a poor soul who has profaned the gifts of God, who, in sinning, has exposed himself to the eternal pain of hell; however, now moved by God's grace, repenting his sins, he wishes to come to God and to be converted. Where is there a truly priestly heart that is not moved by such a sight, that does not feel a keen pity and charity for the penitent sinner?

The second disposition of a priest hearing confessions should be a profound humility. He will not imitate the haughty Pharisee who said: *I am not as the rest of men.*¹ On the contrary, his penitents' confession of their sins will recall

¹ St. LUKE, 18¹¹

to him that he carries in his heart the germ of the same weaknesses; that he too has been so unfortunate as to offend God, that he might have done so even more often and more grievously had it not been for the sustaining help of God's all-powerful grace.

With what care must he not watch over his heart to preserve it in perfect purity! Like a ray of light that penetrates in to pestiferous places without losing its brightness, his thoughts, although turned upon even the most shameful vices, must be ever chaste. He will listen to the failings of the human heart as though he were an angel entirely removed from the empire of the senses, always united to God, free and above all the attacks of evil. What a great misfortune it would be if a ministry destined to purify souls should become for the priest who exercises it an occasion of sin!

2. *The priest as the counsellor of souls.* Perhaps the penitent who humbles himself before the priest has not yet broken with sin; he has not conceived for his faults that true, universal, supernatural, and supreme sorrow which is the necessary condition of the pardon that he asks. The confessor will seek to arouse in his soul this essential disposition. By words persuasively strong and tender, he will soften the

hardened heart, by the love of our Savior, he will inspire it with a sincere regret for having sinned and a generous resolution to serve God henceforth with inviolable fidelity.

Or perhaps it is a soul who, having gone astray, wishes to return to God. His dispositions are good. He appreciates the gravity of sin, repents of his state, and desires to be restored to grace. But he is weak; the occasions that have led him into sin will present themselves anew; he foresees delicate and dangerous temptations that will ensue. There is, indeed, good reason to fear that, notwithstanding his good dispositions at present, he will yield again and will lose the grace which the sacrament of penance restores to him. Hence there are precautions he must take, a rule of life to follow, certain means of perseverance to employ. So there are indications that the confessor must give him. The spiritual physician of souls, he should make known to them not only the proper remedies for their cure, but also the regulations to which they must submit in order to preserve the supernatural life.

Lastly, among the souls that come to seek the help of his ministry, he will meet some whom God has called to a life of perfection.

Chosen souls whom the Holy Spirit has discerned and favored with special graces. If the priest really has the spirit of his office, he will consider these souls as a trust confided to him by God. He will neglect nothing to further God's designs in their regard, introducing them to the principles and maxims of the perfect life, prescribing the exercises of piety compatible with their state of life, helping them to decide their vocation should they feel a special call from God.

Such are the grave duties of a priest as counsellor of souls. It is clearly evident that he needs great tact, prudence, and especially supernatural light to acquit himself worthily of this obligation.

3. *The priest as the judge of souls*, in the exercise of that power of binding and loosing, of remitting sins or retaining them, which has been given him by Jesus Christ. He has heard the confession of the penitent and has imparted his instruction and necessary exhortations. Then he recollects himself and, with mind and heart raised to God, united to Christ the sovereign priest whose place he holds, he pronounces solemnly the formula of absolution. A moment ago he was confident and adviser; now he is the judge. It is in truth a sentence that he

pronounces and this sentence is ratified in heaven. A moment before, this penitent was the enemy of God, he is now his friend; the kingdom of Satan had taken possession of his soul, now it is Christ who reigns there; he was a sinner but now he is justified.

Such is the prerogative of the priest; a sublime privilege which, elevating him above the rest of men, makes him in a way like unto God; for as the Jews said with good reason, *Who can forgive sins, but God only?*¹ It is, on the other hand, an awful prerogative that entails the gravest responsibilities for the priest. Would he not be guilty of a great sin if, the dispenser of the sacrament of reconciliation as he is, he should come to profane it by pronouncing without discernment and without being assured of the penitents' dispositions, the sacred words of absolution? Thus he would absolve the unworthy, pronouncing a sentence that heaven would not ratify.

And what a crime it would be if, in the exercise of this sacred ministry, he should yield to unworthy motives and influences; if interest or favor or human considerations should dictate his judgments; if, in a word, in the holy

¹ St. LUKE, 27

tribunal he should follow any other inspiration than that of his conscience! This is a serious object of reflection for all confessors, from whom an account will one day be required of all the absolutions imprudently given.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My Savior, one day soon I will have the consolation of being the instrument of thy mercies towards poor sinners. I will be always fond of this ministry in which I will find at once a means of testifying my zeal for the salvation of souls and to sanctify my own, provided I remain always a worthy and faithful dispenser of the sacrament. For this three conditions are especially necessary.

The first is knowledge, the absence of which would be most certainly the cause of innumerable errors and of mistakes often irreparable. Here, zeal is not enough. The confessor must have, to fulfill his office worthily, an extensive knowledge of the obligations of different penitents, and the rules to follow in granting or refusing absolution. The time of my seminary training is intended to give me this knowledge and it is one of the principal objects of study here.

Hence I will consider the study of moral theology and of the rules for the guidance of souls as a duty, and I will beware of the presumption that the science of the confessional is to be acquired by experience and not by study.

The second condition that will make me a useful confessor is holiness. How will I make others holy if I myself am not holy? How will I impart a horror for sin if I do not feel such a sentiment myself? How will I lead others to love Christ if I have but a feeble and languishing love for the divine Master?

I will add, then, to the work of study, a sincere application to the development of the interior life in order to draw down upon me the spirit of God and the abundance of his grace. Later on I will not be a holy priest if I am not now a fervent seminarian.

The third condition consists in the perfect independence which the priest ought to exercise in the confessional, putting aside every other consideration except the greater glory of God and the good of souls.

I resolve:

1. To increase my love for souls to whose sanctification I must consecrate my life;

2. To conceive a great horror for sin;

3. During my seminary life, to work hard to acquire a knowledge of moral theology and a spirit of piety, both of which will help me to become a good confessor.

*Ars artium regimen animarum.*¹

¹ St. GREGORY.

XIII

THE PRIEST IN THE PULPIT

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore the plan of divine Providence according to which God wills to make use of creatures to reveal his glory. In the order of nature these witnesses of God are the inanimate things of creation. In the supernatural world the priests of the Church likewise proclaim the perfections of God. We will thank God for having chosen us to join the company of his witnesses.
- II. We will consider that a preacher of the word of God should be convinced of the truths that he preaches, should courageously speak without fear, and should show himself worthy of the faith that he proclaims.
 1. *He should be convinced of the truths that he preaches.* His faith ought to be firmer than that of the simple faithful. But that living faith results from the action of two elements: the profound study of the mysteries of our faith, and the light of grace that is obtained by fervent prayer.
 2. *He should courageously speak without fear.* Charged with bearing testimony to the truth, he ought not conceal it. Like the apostles, he should say: We cannot but speak. For some there are who neglect the duty of preaching, others whose

preaching lacks solidity, and others who, under pretext of prudence, do not proclaim the whole truth.

3. *The priest should show himself worthy of the faith he preaches*, his works bearing witness to his faith. Otherwise he contradicts his own preaching. It is necessary for each one hearing us to see clearly that we are inspired only by love of the truth.

III. We will acknowledge that it is a great honor to be called to proclaim the holy truths of revelation. And we will reflect upon our guilt if, by our negligence, the word of God should lack that solidity, force, and clearness that it needs to enlighten and arouse souls.

We will resolve:

1. To increase our faith in the revealed truths of our holy religion.

2. To prepare seriously and well for every instruction and sermon that we may give, no matter how unimportant it may seem to us.

For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting by us.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the plan of divine Providence according to which God wills to make use of creatures to reveal his glory. It would be easy for him to manifest his truth to souls by a direct revelation. Nevertheless he has preferred to use intermediaries and witnesses for the purpose.

In the order of nature, these witnesses of God are the inanimate creatures, the heavens, the earth, and all they contain, silent preachers that never cease to show forth his grandeur. *The heavens shew forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands.*¹ God, in creating these beings has given to them a vestige of his divine attributes. They are an imperfect image of himself. Whoever contemplates them aright discovers in them a reflection of the perfections of the supreme Being. Thus is it that, without pronouncing any discourses, their praise arises from the whole earth: *There are no speeches nor languages, where their voices are not heard. Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth.*²

Saint Paul, the Fathers, and the Church herself have applied these words to the apostles and their successors in the priesthood. Priests, are, indeed, in the supernatural world what the sun, the stars, all created beings are in the world of nature, witnesses of God. Their mouth makes known his divine perfections, proclaiming the wonders that he has worked to redeem us, announcing to mankind the mysteries of

¹ Ps., 18²

² Ps., 18⁴⁻⁵

the Word incarnate, inspiring souls with his divine teaching, teaching his love and service. Their word is also heard in all parts of the world, and nothing can silence it.

Let us contemplate the magnificent testimony rendered by the sacerdotal word from the beginning of the Church. Let us give a respectful ear to this great voice that has ceaselessly been heard from the height of the pulpit, proclaiming the kingdom of God and of Christ; that word which the apostles received from the lips of the divine Master who came into the world that he might give testimony to the truth, which bishops and priests have preached to mankind and which could be silenced neither by the torture of the persecutors nor the clamor of heresies not the raillery of the unbelievers. So has the Church carried out the command received from our Savior, and so will she continue to do. *You shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth.*¹

Thou hast chosen me, O my God, to lend my voice also to this testimony of thee. Grant that I may sufficiently appreciate this divine mission and understand the conditions that it

¹ ACTS, 1⁸

requires. Give me the grace to neglect nothing in the worthy preparation therefor.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The preacher of the word of God should be convinced of the truths to which he testifies, should courageously speak without fear, and should, by the holiness of his life, show himself worthy of the faith that he preaches.

1. *He should be convinced of the truths that he preaches.* The faith of a priest bearing testimony to the truth ought to be firmer, keener, and more unshakable than that of the simple faithful. If it is hesitating, feeble, uncertain, if it does not rest on a deep conviction, how will his word lead souls to believe in what he scarcely believes himself?

But that living, enlightening, deeply rooted faith which a priest ought to possess, in order to be a confirmed witness of the mysteries of God, results from the action of two elements, one human and natural, the other supernatural and divine.

The first is the serious and profound study of the mysteries of the incarnate Word, his example, his teaching, his doctrine, all the truths included in the deposit of revelation

and the proofs on which they rest. In the beginning the Holy Spirit gave all this knowledge to the apostles without it costing them any labor. But who is there among us that would dare to pretend that God will repeat such a miracle for him? It is therefore by the painful labor of reflection and study, by the attentive reading of Scripture and the monuments of sacred science, by applying our reason to the investigation of the foundations on which rests the edifice of our holy religion, by acquiring a knowledge of its dogmas, that we will come to possess that science which is the necessary base of priestly faith. It is not infused knowledge; it must be acquired.

Hence arises the obligation of study, so often recalled to our attention in the seminary, which we should always keep before our mind as one of the most fundamental that we have to fulfill. We can not neglect it without becoming grievously accountable before God and the Church.

The second element of a priest's faith is the light of grace which, added to the fruit of study, makes our knowledge supernatural. Fervent prayer and meditation on Christian truths will call down from God this enlightenment of his grace. For a priest it is a funda-

mental grace. Unfortunately to-day what is especially lacking on every side is a deep-rooted conviction in regard to the truths of religion. Even among us there are some who have yielded to this deplorable influence. In them Christ does not find firmly convinced witnesses. Is it not the reason why the priest's words often lack that living strength, that warmth, without which they remain fruitless? Not emanating from a soul thoroughly convinced, how will they carry conviction to those who listen?

2. *He should courageously speak without fear.* Charged with bearing testimony to the truth, he ought not conceal it. Not only should he possess the light: he is commissioned to spread it about him. For that purpose he is a priest; it distinguishes him from the simple faithful and makes him a witness of Christ. *Woe unto me*, says St. Paul, *if I preach not the gospel for a necessity lieth upon me.*¹ The apostles, when brought before the tribunal at Jerusalem that wished to seal their lips which the Holy Spirit had opened, announced in their fearless zeal: *We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*² Does that bold cry burst

¹ I COR., 9¹⁶

² ACTS, 4²⁰

from the lips of every priest? Let us consider some of the dangers that threaten to frustrate the zeal of many.

There are some priests who, having neither the love of God in their heart nor zeal for the salvation of souls, almost completely neglect the duty of instructing their flock, a duty imposed upon them by the Church. They abdicate their glorious honor of being witnesses to Jesus Christ.

Others there are, in greater number, who acquit themselves of this obligation but very imperfectly. In their preaching there is neither solidity nor power nor the unction of piety nor vehemence. The minds of their hearers are not enlightened nor are their hearts moved. Their word remains without fruit.

Some are timid, pusillanimous witnesses of the truth, restrained by fear, who, under the pretext of prudence, fall into a blameworthy practice of prevarication. When in the pulpit, for fear of wounding the delicate ears of their hearers and offending certain prejudices, they pass over important dogmas in silence or alter them, they dissimulate essential obligations, they abstain from condemning faulty maxims. The gospel which they preach and to which they bear testimony is not the real gospel of Christ. It is a sugar-coated gospel, modified,

adapted to the tastes and caprices of people of the world. They would enlarge the narrow path that leads to heaven; by feeble condescension, instead of drawing souls out of sin, they sink them deeper therein; instead of dispelling the darkness by the light of the truth, they only make the darkness more obscure. May Christ find among us many faithful witnesses!

3. *The priest should show himself worthy of the faith he preaches*, testifying to the truth not only by his words but by his entire conduct; that there should be a perfect accord between his discourses and his works, so that in hearing him, one could not doubt that what he says is the true expression of his deepest convictions and that his lips speak from the abundance of his heart.

It was so with the apostles and martyrs, those admirable witnesses of Christ who, to confirm their testimony, suffered persecution and even poured forth their blood. They were worthy of their faith. And the world believed in their word. When they said that the Word of God became flesh, died for us, arose from the dead and ascended to heaven, that only those can be saved who range themselves among the number of his disciples, the world accepted their preaching and became Christian.

But is not this lacking in the testimony that

many priests render to Christ and his gospel? Does not this help to explain the fruitlessness of their preaching? They may speak with great studied eloquence, but it is hollow eloquence. Between what they say and what they do their hearers perceive a shocking contradiction. Certain maxims they preach, but others they practice; one set of rules they lay down for their flock, but another they follow in their own lives. How can their words be taken seriously, how will the faithful be influenced by their preaching to impose on themselves duties which the preacher himself neglects? They are not sincere witnesses; their testimony will not be accepted because it contradicts itself.

We ought to be witnesses worthy of credence. It is true that not all priests are called upon to shed their blood for the truths which they preach: but, under pain of having a fruitless ministry, they must conduct themselves in all things as men giving testimony to the truth, who, having happily found the way that leads to the true life, are urged to lead others the same way.

We must be worthy of belief. It is necessary for each one hearing us speak to understand and see clearly that we are inspired only by love of the truth, that we are not playing a

part. We should not give any ground for the accusation that we are but plying our trade.

Such should be our life that our hearers, if they should not follow our words, would at least understand that in refusing to do so, they were resisting the truth which God announces by our lips.

Holy priests have no need of supporting by long reasonings the truths which they preach. Their word alone suffices to carry conviction in the souls of men. The testimony which they pay to God and his truth is self-demonstrative like that of God himself. They will be believed because by their lives they show their sincere conviction of the truth of what they preach.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, what an honor it is for me to be called to proclaim thy holy truths before the faithful, to confirm thy divine oracles by my testimony, to implant thy teaching in the souls and hearts of men! When my voice will be heard from the pulpit, I will be the echo of a voice more sublime that will speak by my lips; my word will be the word of God. What nobler or holier mission could I have?

But the loftier this mission is, the more guilty

I will be if, in exercising it, I should not be a faithful witness of my Master, if I should subject the holy word to those alterations which St. Paul bewailed in some preachers of his time: *For we are not as many*, he said, *adulterating the word of God*;¹ if, by my negligence, it should lack the solidity, force, and clearness that it needs to enlighten and arouse souls, to move sinners to conversion.

Permit not that it be so, dear Lord. The word is par excellence the instrument of sacerdotal zeal; it has produced wonderful fruit on the lips of prophets, apostles, and all holy priests. I will therefore take a most zealous interest in my office of preacher. I will neglect nothing to worthily fulfill its obligations and will strive to fulfill the conditions that ought to be found in a true, sincere witness of God.

I resolve:

1. To increase my faith in the revealed truths of our holy religion;
2. To prepare seriously and well for every instruction and sermon that I may give, no matter how unimportant it may seem to me.

*For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting by us.*²

¹ II COR., 2¹⁷

² II COR., 5²⁰

XIV

OBSTACLES IN THE PRIESTHOOD

SUMMARY

I. We will adore God imposing on man in all his works the law of labor and struggle. Every day we see this law manifested in the material order. In works of the moral order the obstacle to be encountered is the devil. The Church has constantly beheld this enemy before her. We will adore the inscrutable ways of Providence and will ask of the Holy Spirit the divine force of which we stand in need.

II. We will consider these three obstacles raised by the devil against our zeal: ignorance, concupiscence, and ingratitude.

1. *The darkness of ignorance.* Man is born for the truth, yet often clings to error and prejudice. The preaching of the apostles and the establishment of the Church are a clear proof of it; idolatry no longer exists among us, but the gospel light continues to encounter the darkness of ignorance.

2. *The seductions of concupiscence.* There is nothing more deeply rooted in the heart of man than the love of pleasure. Christ declared himself the enemy of inordinate pleasure-seeking. And herein is the irreconcilable antagonism between Christianity and the world.

3. *Ingratitude.* Often its effect is to greatly weaken our zeal. It may arise from the lack of encouragement on the part of our superiors, from the legitimate criticism or jealousy of our fellow-priests, or from the want of appreciation and co-operation on the part of the faithful whom we serve. But it will have no power to discourage us if our heart is in Christ.

III. We will recall that, like the apostles, we must not rely on human means nor our own personal resources, but on the grace of God.

We will resolve:

1. To acquire solid virtue that will be able to withstand the obstacles we must encounter;

2. To accustom ourselves to act in all things by the movement and help of God's grace, always prompted by supernatural motives.

Not I, but the grace of God with me.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God imposing on man in all his works the law of labor and struggle and willing that nothing great be accomplished without strife against numerous obstacles.

Every day we see this law manifested in the material order of creation. In all that he undertakes to improve his earthly existence, man sees lined up against him all the united forces of nature, as it seems, to arrest the progress of his activity. To make them serve his needs he must subdue them.

In works of the moral order, there is also an obstacle to be encountered. It is the devil, who, ever since the sin of our first parents, has sought ceaselessly, everywhere, and in every possible way, to oppose the progress and development of good.

The Christian who wishes to be perfect must meet this obstacle and must take up a violent and continual struggle against it. This is the spiritual combat of the soul. Each precious victory is dearly bought.

The priest working for the conquest of souls will also have to struggle against the devil who, will strive for the possession of these same souls. Often these evil efforts neutralize the influence of a priest's zeal.

The Church in her progress through the ages has constantly beheld the same enemy before her, whom she has repeatedly overthrown but who is for ever bent on bringing about her ruin.

Indeed it would seem that God himself had been checked in the exercise of his infinite power by the efforts of the devil. The Almighty gives him the liberty of acting and of rising up against the divine power and goodness. God combats him and in his infinite wisdom finds the secret of making him serve

in the accomplishment of the divine will. But he does not annihilate him.

Let us adore this mysterious conduct of God without trying to understand it. Let us prepare to sustain the struggle in which, we are going to be engaged as witnesses of Christ and his gospel. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to communicate to us the divine force of which we stand in need to remain always firm and unshakable. That the sight of the danger should not weaken our courage, let us consider in our meditation what are the obstacles which the enemy of all good would raise against us and which we must combat and overcome.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

To oppose and frustrate the testimony that we will soon be called upon to render to the truth, the devil raises up a triple obstacle: the darkness of ignorance and error; the seductions of concupiscence; and ingratitude.

1. *The darkness of ignorance.* Man is born for the truth and endowed with an intellect to acquire it; hence it would seem that to show the truth would be enough to make him accept it eagerly. But it is not so. By a strange contrariety the human mind clings to its errors,

its prejudices, its ignorance. It enjoys the darkness and is pained at being brought into the light. It struggles against the truth, closes its eyes in the presence of light, and turns away so as not to see it.

The preaching of the apostles and the establishment of the Church are a clear proof of it. When the disciples, leaving the upper room at Jerusalem, went forth to give their testimony for the first time, ignorance and error reigned on all sides; most monstrous doctrines had usurped the place of truth in nearly all minds. And the world, far from accepting with eager joy the light which came to them, repelled it with an obstinacy that would have discouraged men less firm than these who were strengthened with the grace of the apostolate. The Word of God announced by them was not at first received in this world which he had made: *He came unto his own and his own received him not.*¹ Everywhere the preaching of the gospel met opposition, and it was only after many struggles, and the outpouring of much blood, that idolatry was overthrown and the reign of Christ established on its ruins.

To-day there are no idolaters among us; but

¹ St. JOHN, 1¹¹

other errors have taken the place of the former, and the gospel light continues to encounter the darkness of ignorance. In city and country ignorance of religion is lamentably widespread. How many there are who have scarcely heard the mysteries of our faith spoken of! How many for whom Christ is almost unknown! The word of the preacher can not reach these poor wandering souls, filled with a thousand prejudices and led astray by a false proselytism that corrupts their mind.

To scatter the clouds of their prejudices that hide the truth from them, to disabuse them of their preconceptions—such is evidently a capital object of priestly zeal. But a difficult task, laborious and often discouraging; nevertheless an indispensable one that ought to be undertaken with hope and great good will. We are rightly supposed to be men of light whose duty it is to spread it about us by fighting and pursuing error. When we have gained admission for the light of truth into men's souls, we have done much to convert them.

2. *The seductions of concupiscence.* We may call them the attractions of pleasure and joy. Therein we may find the principal secret and the explanation of that resistance which so many offer to the practice of Christianity.

There is nothing more deeply rooted in the heart of man than the love of pleasure. As something bad, it is the depravation of that attraction which leads man to seek his supreme good. We find it on every side and under various forms. The human heart craves for joy; whatever presents the prospect of pleasure attracts it passionately; just as, on the other hand, whatever appears painful and sorrowful inspires it with horror and repulsion. The human heart craves for joy and to satisfy this instinct it will sometimes commit crimes of greatest excess; as means thereto it will even undergo great labor and sacrifice; often inert and feeble in the presence of duty, it shows a boundless activity in the pursuit of pleasure.

At every page of the gospel we find Christ declaring himself the enemy of such pleasure seeking. He condemns it, anathematizes it; he wants for disciples only those who generously renounce it. The cross is his symbol. The more mortified a souls is, the more it belongs to him, the more holy and perfect it becomes.

Herein above all is the irreconcilable antagonism between Christianity and the world, the great obstacle that retards the diffusion of the evangelical word. If the Church would with-

draw the doctrine of the cross and substitute for it that of pleasure, everybody would rush to her standard. But, as she can contemplate no compromise in this matter, so many people regard her laws as too hard: *this saying is hard*,¹ and they hold themselves aloof.

Such is the subtle enemy we must combat. We meet souls quite given up to the pleasures of the senses, absorbed in the interests of earth and forgetting those of eternity; weak souls that have not the courage to break the bonds that attach them to creatures and to make the sacrifices that God requires of them. How often do we not see our efforts frustrated and our zeal without fruit? How many souls will come before our pulpit only to go away saddened because they learn that to be Christians they must impose certain privations on themselves for which duty they lack the courage.

3. *Ingratitude.* Among human consolations and encouragements there are few more effective than the open expression of genuine appreciation for our efforts. For the nature of man's heart is such that its activity is stimulated by gratitude, whereas lack of appreciation is like a heavy mist upon it, almost extinguishing its zeal.

¹ ST. JOHN, 6⁶¹

This ingratitude may come from our superiors, our fellow-priests, or the faithful whom we serve.

The bishop is our superior. Because of his position, his experience, and his maturer years, he will probably have a truer and broader view of our efforts than we will ourselves. It may also happen that he is not correctly informed. At any rate, our enthusiasm may suffer diminution for want of his encouraging appreciation.

The opposition on the part of our fellow-priests may arise from either good or unworthy motives. Our zeal, though it can not be too strong, yet may be badly directed; it may be imprudently exercised. In such case our very best friends will not praise our efforts. But there may be others among our fellow-laborers in the Lord's vineyard who look upon the most worthy successes of our zeal in a spirit of jealousy, considering the praise of others as equivalent to their own disparagement and regarding anybody else's success as a reflection on their own lack of zeal. A spirit of humility will save us from discouragement. And we may learn much to our profit from such opposition and criticism; for our friends are slow to tell us our faults or point out our mistakes.

Lastly, ingratitude on the part of the faithful whom we serve. Just as the human consolation of their gratitude and coöperation is sufficient to offset any misunderstanding that may arise in other parts, so the lack thereof makes other human appreciation of little consolation. For these souls now entrusted to our care we have undergone many years of study and special training; to save and sanctify them we have become priests; to serve them we devote our time, our convenience, our strength of mind and body, in short, all that we have; and are even ready to spend our very life in their service. Hence we naturally look to them for gratitude and appreciation.

Whence comes the power of this ingratitude to weaken our zeal? It comes from our own false standard. If we set our heart on earthly things, if we labor for earthly reward, these failing, our heart is saddened and the fire of our zeal is quenched. But we must remember that we are God's priests, ambassadors of Christ; our joy is in the Lord and his service our privilege to be his coöperators, our reward his love and friendship. Human ingratitude is powerless against a priest whose heart is in Christ. He will say with St. Paul: *I most*

*gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls: although loving you more, I be loved less.*¹

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My Savior, the considerations that I have just made, convince me that thy minister must encounter most trying obstacles while serving thee, and I understand that they will make my ministry a failure unless I overcome them by the help of thy grace. It was not by human means, relying on their personal resources, that the apostles converted the world, but by the strength of thy Holy Spirit living in them. On the same condition rests my success in the mission that will soon be entrusted to me. If I counted only on my own diligence, the undertaking would be an unpardonable presumption on my part. But with thee, dear Lord, all will be possible. Helped by thy grace I will overthrow the obstacles that oppose the effort of my zeal.

Throughout my life as a priest I will rely on thy grace for which I will make daily, even hourly petition. Without it I can accomplish nothing. I pray for it now to accomplish the

¹ II COR., 12¹⁵

work of my personal sanctification; and later I will ask it that my ministry may bear fruit. In all that I will undertake for thy glory and the salvation of souls, I will depend more on thy help than upon my own efforts. In thee I will place my confidence.

I resolve:

1. To acquire solid virtue that will be able to withstand the obstacles I must encounter;

2. To accustom myself to act in all things by the movement and help of God's grace, always prompted by supernatural motives.

*Not I, but the grace of God with me.*¹

¹ I COR., 15¹⁰

XV

ENCOURAGEMENTS IN THE PRIESTHOOD

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore the wisdom of God making even sin serve his providential designs. This should console those who are struggling on earth for the cause of God and his truth. We will bear in mind that Christ does not abandon us in the combat.
- II. We will consider this triple encouragement supplied by faith: the consciousness of duty accomplished, the hope of eternal reward, and the assurance of success that will sooner or later crown our efforts.

1. *The consciousness of duty accomplished.* The saints were eminently men of duty. A priest has special need of being guided by this noble motive. Without being indifferent to the loss of souls, we must not be cast down by apparent insuccess. God asks of us only zealous effort.

2. *The hope of eternal reward.* A priest should often think of heaven, especially in moments of sadness and discouragement. God rewards not success, but faithful perseverance. The seeming fruitlessness of a priest's constant labor will make his crown the more glorious.

3. *The infallible assurance of a success that will sooner or later crown our efforts.* It may not follow

immediately but it will surely come, for Christ has promised it. Our good efforts always help to perpetuate the Church in the world and to sanctify the souls of God's elect.

III. We will recall that St. Paul rejoiced at the thought of the tribulations that he was about to encounter. We will take a clear and sensible view of the genuine fruits of our future ministry.

We will resolve:

1. To pray much to bring down heaven's blessing on the work of the ministry and to obtain the conversion of sinners;

2. To increase our confidence in God's providence;

3. To labor seriously at our own sanctification, realizing that the holier we are the greater success we will have in leading souls to God.

Have confidence, I have overcome the world.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the wisdom of God, directing all the events of the world and making them serve in a mysterious but infallible manner in the accomplishment of his divine plans. Even sin itself, which he permits to have so large a place, has its providential role and serves, in a certain way, to accomplish the designs of God. The devil, who inspires sin, can carry off some partial triumphs, but the definite victory is always God's.

This is a thought well calculated to console the souls who are struggling on earth for the cause of God and his truth. They have to contend, indeed, against many obstacles; and at times the resistance which they encounter is so strong and their efforts seem so fruitless that they would be tempted to abandon the struggle if they did not know that God, who can never be vanquished, is with them and for them. But, sustained by his assurance, they patiently wait for their divine protector to manifest his presence and give them the victory which he has promised.

How much more this assurance should console the priests whom Christ himself sends as he sent the apostles, as he was himself sent by the Father, to carry out his work by being his witnesses in the world: *As my Father sent me, I also send you.*¹ He has also said to us: *He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me.*²

Christ does not abandon us in the combat. From heaven's height, where he is reigning, he sustains us by his almighty power, and his grace is always with us. If our foes are strong,

¹ St. JOHN, 22²⁴

² St. LUKE, 10¹⁶

our defender is still stronger. *Greater is he that is in you, says St. John, than he that is in the world.*¹

With entire confidence, let us follow the guidance, of Christ, the divine head of Church; supported by his help, let us be fearless: *Through thy name we will despise them that rise up against us.*²

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The priest meets great obstacles in the work of the ministry. Often, because of the apathy or ill-will of those for whom he labors, all his efforts seem to be without fruit. Hence it is that many priests who have started out with firm courage and exalted hopes have succumbed to the desolating influence of this discouragement and have lost their zeal.

To help us resist this tendency, faith supplies us with a triple encouragement: the consciousness of a duty accomplished; the hope of reward; and the infallible assurance of a success that will sooner or later crown our efforts.

1. *The consciousness of duty accomplished.* The accomplishment of duty is the loftiest and

¹ I JOHN, 4⁴

² Ps. 43⁶

holiest rule of life that we can propose to ourselves and, for a generous will, there is no other equally powerful and persuasive. It is the motive that inspired so many heroic sacrifices in the saints; they were eminently men of duty.

More than other people the priest has need of being guided by this noble thought in the exercise of his sacred ministry and of seeking therein a remedy against the discouragement that may arise from his apparent failure.

Let us not confound this spirit with that egoistic indifference which, under pretext that, our duty performed and our task accomplished, we have nothing with which to reproach ourselves, makes us insensible to the loss of souls. Such a sentiment does not find entrance into the heart of a true priest. At the thought of his offended God, at the sight of the sins that flood the earth and of the multitude of sinners on the road to their eternal damnation in spite of the zeal of good priests, his heart is saddened and he is prepared to make every sacrifice for the sake of converting these sinners and leading them back to God.

Nevertheless this sad prospect does not make him dejected or negligent. However fruitless his ministry may seem to be, he continues to

devote himself to its exercise with all his zeal as to a sacred duty imposed by God.

What God asks of us is not success, not the conversion of a multitude of sinners or the progress of a great number of the just. He requires only zealous work of us; he asks of us, as he did of the apostles, that we be witnesses to him and his truth; *You will be witnesses to me*,¹ he said to them. The rest is the work of his grace and nowise depends on us. This is the teaching of St. Paul clearly set down in his first epistle to the Corinthians. Writing to them of their conversion to Christianity, he says: *I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase*.² If he wills to bless our work with immediate success, we will rejoice and glorify; and if, by an unsearchable judgment of his divine providence, he permits us apparently to fail, we will likewise adore his goodness and his providential decrees. In either case we will have the consolation that comes from the consciousness of having performed our task nobly and faithfully. How many good priests seem, in the sight of human understanding, to have failed miserably!

¹ ACT., 1⁸

² I COR., 3⁶

2. *The hope of reward. He that shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*¹ These words are the powerful encouragement that our Lord gives to his priests in the midst of their trials. They should often think of heaven. Have they not renounced everything on earth, professing to seek and to desire only God? *The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup: it is thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me.*² Heaven is, therefore, everything for us. Is it not heaven, that glorious heaven promised by God, which ought to replace in our eyes all those things to which the heart of man is attached on earth, all those human satisfactions of which we have learned the nothingness?

If we ought faithfully apply mind and heart to the thought of heaven, it is especially in those painful moments when discouragement and sadness threaten to invade our soul. Earth may indeed, be, without consolation for us. But if we raise our eyes to contemplate the eternal reward, if we regard the blessed end of our labor, we will feel a new force and confidence arise within us. It is not to apparent

¹ St. MATTH., 5¹³

² Ps., 15⁵

success, but to constant and persevering fidelity that our Savior promises the crown of glory: *Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*¹

Let a priest not forget this truth, that on the last day account will be taken of all that he has done for God and for souls. Not a single act of charity in his heart, nor a prayer, not an effort of his zeal will go unrewarded.

We need scarcely add that his constancy in the work of the ministry, notwithstanding the seeming uselessness and barrenness of his efforts, will make his crown the more glorious and his reward the greater. How many others, perhaps more favored and happier in the eyes of men, will find themselves less rich in merit before God, because the complacency of self-love will have lessened the meritorious value of their work? He who has been obliged to plant the seed of priestly effort in the bitterness of failure, will one day reap the harvest of eternal glory: *Going they went and wept, casting their seeds. But coming they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves.*²

¹ St. MATTH., 25²¹

² Ps., 125⁶

3. *The infallible assurance of a success that will sooner or later crown our efforts.* Let every priest have, as a fundamental conviction, that his labor is not in vain even from the point of view of this life. Therefore, my beloved brethren, St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *be ye steadfast and immovable; always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*¹ These words still aptly apply to the work of the ministry.

The cause that we maintain and defend is the cause of Jesus Christ, of his Church, of his truth. But it is certainly impossible that this holy cause should not finally triumph; it may undergo a temporary setback or relapse, but it will at last be victorious.

Then, too, when a good priest works, it is Christ who works in him and by him, just as, when he prays, it is Christ who prays: *Behold I am with you all days.*² Christ, however, never works in vain, as he never prays ineffectively.

Lastly, we have the Master's word of promise. *In the world you shall have distress. but have confidence, I have overcome the world.*³ *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all*

¹ I COR., 15⁵⁸

² St. MATTH., 28²⁰

³ St. JOHN, 16³³

*things to myself.*¹ If this is true, how then does it happen that so many priests, in spite of the zeal which they exercise obtain such scanty results?

In the first place, one may say that every good priest who works in the spirit of our Savior reaps some fruit from his labor. Does he succeed in leading a single soul to heaven? Does he prevent some mortal sins? Would not even that be a result worthy of his efforts? And what truly zealous priest can not testify that, in the course of his ministry, he has saved, not one, but many souls?

Let us add an important fact, quite necessary if we would appreciate the result of priestly zeal: it is not so much the individual fruit that results directly from our efforts as the collective work in which we concur. All priests labor in the same work: the perpetuation of the Church in the world and, in the Church the sanctification of the elect whom God, from all eternity, has predestined to glory. Notwithstanding the obstacles raised by the devil, this work continues and will continue until the end of the world. And all good priests by their zeal contribute to its accomplishment.

¹ St. JOHN, 12³²

Such or such a parish may seem to show very little results for the labor of its zealous priests. But their work is no more lost than are their prayers before the tabernacle. This work and these prayers, inspired by the spirit of Christ, supreme Pastor, have their result at least in the collective work. Men, it is true, may not be aware of this result; but is none the less real; and, at the great final judgment, when the plan of God in the the government of the Church, will be revealed, then the whole world will understand this mysterious solidarity which unites the works of all good priests for a common result.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The great apostle of the Gentiles, contemplating the suffering and persecution that he would have to endure for the name of Christ and the salvation of souls, writes: *Bands and affliction wait for me at Jerusalem. But I fear none of these things, neither do I count my life more precious than myself, so that I may consummate my course and the ministry of the word which I received from the Lord Jesus.*¹

This is the spirit in which every priest should

¹ ACTS, 20²³⁻²⁴

regard the ministry. Such will therefore, be my point of view during my seminary training. I will not deceive myself as to the fruits of my future ministry. I will not flatter myself with the chimerical hope of a success that would evidently be only a dream of my imagination. But at the prospect of much hard work that may be seemingly without its fruit, I will not lose courage. Trusting in the grace of my vocation, assured that I am doing God's work, I will devote myself conscientiously to the task that will be assigned me, like a soldier who remains at his post, however dangerous, because he knows that the outcome of the battle and the safety of the army may depend on him.

I resolve:

1. To pray much to bring down heaven's blessing on the work of the ministry and to obtain the conversion of sinners;

2. To increase my confidence in God's providence;

3. To labor seriously at my own sanctification, realizing that the holier I am the greater success I will have in leading souls to God.

*Have confidence, I have overcome the world.*¹

¹ St. JOHN, 16²²

TYPES OF THE SACERDOTAL LIFE

XVI

—A THE UNFAITHFUL PRIEST

SUMMARY

I. We shall adore the Providence of God which suffers evil to exist along with the good, a law illustrated by the parable of the cockle. There were bad angels; among the Apostles there was a Judas; there are priests who profane their sacred ministry. We shall make an act of reparation for the sacrileges such unfaithful priests commit.

II. We shall consider the history of Judas in order to form an idea of a bad priest:

1. Although Judas yielded himself at first to the influence of Our Lord's divine ascendancy, certain traits of the Gospel narrative shows that he was not docile, that he was censorious, and that he became gradually enslaved by the passion of avarice. The seminary life of the future wicked priest is apt to be characterized by such faults.

2. Judas sold his divine Master and betrayed him by a kiss. This sacrilegious conduct is reproduced in the priest who goes to the altar in a state of sin, exercises the sacred ministry in a mercenary spirit, causes the loss of souls entrusted to him by Our Lord.

3. Judas falls into despair, and is eternally lost. It is very seldom that a bad priest is converted; he either dies in despair or in the still more terrible state of insensibility.

III. We shall beg our Divine Saviour to grant that we may die rather than become unfaithful priests.

Resolutions:

1. To examine our whole life with the utmost care.

2. To be perfectly frank with our director.

3. To prepare ourselves for our ordinations with fervor.

It were better for him, if that man had not been born.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore Our Lord revealing to us, in the parable of the cockle mingled with the good grain, one of the most mysterious of the laws of Providence, the astonishing mingling of good and evil which is manifest in all parts of the created world. God made nothing but what is good: *God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good.*¹ But in giving his creatures liberty to do evil, he has given them power to mar the beauty of his work, by bringing into it disorder and sin.

Among the twelve disciples whom the Saviour associated with himself in order to make of

¹GEN., 1³¹

them the foundation of his church, men whom he called his friends, his children, his brethren, whom he had himself instructed and trained, to whom he had entrusted all that was most precious, his doctrine, his divine power, his priesthood, there was found a bad priest.

There always have been, and there ever will be, imitators of Judas, profaners of the priesthood. God in his unsearchable wisdom suffers them to exist; he does not withdraw from them the powers which they received in ordination; he comes down upon the altar into their sacrilegious hands and at their word he absolves sinners; notwithstanding their unworthiness they remain the channels of his grace.

Prostrate at the feet of Our Lord, let us make an act of reparation for the sacrileges committed by unfaithful priests. Let us pray most earnestly that he may never permit anyone of those who are preparing in this house for ordination thus to profane his holy Priesthood.

II. CONSIDERATION

To help us form an idea of the unfaithful priest and to strengthen our determination never to become such, let us think of the history of Judas Iscariot, the hateful type which every bad priest reproduces.

1. We may assume that when chosen to "be with" Jesus and to be "sent by him" Judas possessed a certain moral aptitude which fitted him for his mission, and that he yielded at first to the influence of his Master's divine ascendancy. But the privilege of being in the intimate circle of the twelve did not preclude the necessity of coöperating with the transforming grace which was to prepare him to represent Christ before the world. It was in this constant prolonged coöperation that he failed. Toward the end of the ministry in Galilee there is an incident which appears to indicate lack of submission to Our Lord's teaching. Our Lord says in reference to him after the great test to which the promise of the Eucharist had submitted his followers: *One of you is a devil.*¹ Later we see him censoriously condemning the pious prodigality of Mary; and St. John attributes his conduct to that passion of avarice which was soon to lead to the betrayal.²

Fervent seminarians may become unfaithful priests; and this must fill us all with fear, and keep us in a salutary distrust of ourselves. But ordinarily one who is a bad priest was

¹ST. JOHN, 6⁷¹

²ST. JOHN, 12⁶

characterized at the seminary by indocility, by censoriousness, and by more or less manifest yieldings to the passion which eventually proved fatal. This passion in Judas was avarice; in others it may be impurity; in others intemperance; in others pride. Its effects may be hardly perceptible at first; but if it is not sternly checked in its beginnings its tendencies gain strength, it causes frequent slight falls, and an experienced eye can perceive that it will finally be victorious.

Such are in the seminary the preludes which cause one to fear that the future will be evil. Let us now see the abyss to which they point.

2. The abyss into which Judas fell was sacrilegious treason of the Saviour.

The first abyss into which the unfaithful priests falls is sacrilege. It is this crime which properly speaking fixes the distinctive character of the bad priest. The moment when he becomes a bad priest is that when he first commits a sacrilege. He has had the misfortune to fall; his conscience suggests that he go humble himself at the feet of his confessor; he resists this warning and with a mortal sin upon his soul he goes to the altar. This is a terrible step, with incalculable consequences. He has

entered a way in which he will daily make fresh progress. He will heap sacrilege upon sacrilege; remorse will have soon ceased to torment him; faith will be darkened; all the instincts of Christian piety will be weakened.

When the sentiments which are the motive power of the good priest have ceased to inspire him, the exercise of his ministry will become a vulgar traffic. His purpose in saying Mass and in the other functions of the divine ministry will be not to glorify God and to save souls, but to make money. If the ministry did not pay he would cease to exercise it. A steward of heavenly treasures, he gives them in exchange for lucre. After having profaned the blood of his Lord he sells it.

Christ had confided to him a treasure which is more precious in his eyes than even the Most Holy Sacrament of his body and blood—souls—souls which he loved to the extent of dying for them, souls which he has redeemed and which he wills to make partakers of his glory. He entrusted them to the priest. And this priest instead of sanctifying them, profanes them; instead of imparting life he gives death; instead of consecrating them to the Saviour, he places them under the power of Satan; instead of leading them to heaven, he casts them into hell.

For the wicked priest is always a stumbling-block for souls. He scandalizes them because he neglects them and does nothing to save them; he scandalizes them by his bad example; he may even go to the length of directly tempting them to evil.

The unfaithful priest's life passes in the midst of these profanations and of these horrible crimes; let us now consider his lamentable death.

3. Judas dies in despair. When he realized the enormity of his crime, instead of throwing himself upon the mercy of Our Lord, he ends a life which had become unbearable by a new crime and, according to the common tradition, was cast into hell: *He departed and went and hanged himself with an halter.*¹ *It were better for him, if that man had not been born.*²

The wicked priest may, indeed, like any other sinner, turn to God by penance and receive forgiveness. There have been examples of this, but they are rare. As a general rule the priest who has lived in the profanation of his priesthood dies impenitent, and of none more truly than of him may we say: *Such as is his life, such shall be his death.*

¹ ST. MATT., 27⁵

² ST. MATT., 26²⁴

A confessor called to the death-bed of a brother priest was exhorting him to confidence in the blood of Christ. "I have profaned it in torrents," answered the despairing sinner.

There is something still more frightful than this despair, which, at least, denotes some remnants of faith, and offers some opening for repentance. It is insensibility, the state of a soul on which the truths of faith can make no impression. And such is often the state of the unfaithful priest at the approach of death. It is thus that he will appear before his judge to render an account of a life which instead of being an example of holiness, was but a tissue of crimes.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Never permit, O Lord, that I become a bad priest. The thought of such a fearful possibility fills me with dread. Rather than profane thy priesthood I would undergo any suffering, I would willingly and gladly die.

To avoid such a misfortune, I resolve:

1. To examine myself with care to see if, in my life as a seminarian, there are any of the signs which indicate incipient infidelity to the grace of the priesthood—indocility, censoriousness, yielding to some ruling passion.

2. To be perfectly frank in telling my director what this examination reveals; and, according to his advice, either to give up a state for which I am not fitted and in which I should lose my soul, or to fight with energy against any failing which is of a nature to arouse apprehension.

3. To prepare myself for my ordinations with as much fervor as I can, in order to receive in abundance the graces which will save me from the misfortune I have been meditating on.

It were better for him, if that man had not been born.¹

¹ ST. MATT., 26²⁴

XVII

—B THE INSIGNIFICANT PRIEST

SUMMARY

I. We shall adore Our Lord stigmatizing the hireling who neglects his sheep and abandons them at the moment of danger, the servant who fails to make his talent productive and the one who sleeps when he should be watching. He thus gives us to understand how he detests lukewarmness in priests. We shall entreat him to fill us with zeal.

II. We shall make two considerations on the insignificant priest, studying:

1. *His priestly formation.* He entered the seminary in a mechanical way. He never clearly understood the grandeur of the priesthood. Everything in him was mediocre and vulgar. Feasts, retreats, ordinations, made on him only passing impressions.

2. *His life as a priest.* He was very glad to get out of the seminary. He gives no scandal; he is a fairly respectable man; but he is no priest. He does not love study. He has no zeal. He languishes and everything languishes around him! He was charged with the care of his brethren and his ministry is sterile. He is not much preoccupied about the judgments of God; but what an awakening when he appears before the tribunal of Christ!

III. We shall examine ourselves to see if we are in the state of lukewarmness. We shall beg our divine Master to dispel our illusions.

We will resolve:

1. To purify our intentions;
2. To profit by the graces of sanctification;
3. Frequently to stir up our fervor.

I would thou wert cold or hot, but because thou art lukewarm, . . . I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.

I. ADORATION

There is a great difference between the wicked priest and the insignificant priest. The latter accomplishes his duties substantially and he is not a direct cause of the ruin of souls. But if he has no great vices, he has no great virtues. He is a mediocrity. Lukewarmness is his most characteristic fault. Our Lord had him in mind when he described the shepherd who neglects the care of his sheep and flees when danger threatens them, and the thriftless servant who neglects to gain anything with the talent entrusted to him, or sleeps instead of watching until the moment of his master's return. It is to him more justly than to anyone that we may apply the severe words of Our Lord, addressed to the Church of Laodicea: *I would that thou wert cold or hot, but because*

thou art lukewarm, . . . I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.

Let us adore our Lord making us understand what holiness and what fervor He desires in His ministers, and pray Him to inspire us all in this meditation with the desire to become zealous priests, priests animated by that charity which the Holy Ghost produced in the Apostles, our Fathers and our Models.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider the insignificant priest, first in his seminary training, secondly in his life as a priest.

1. The insignificant priest was a *mediocre seminarian*. Thoughtless, dissipated, he never really analysed his own motives; never did piety or virtue take deep root in him.

His determination to enter into the clerical state was not criminal; he would not have wished to do so without a vocation. But his entrance was, like everything else, mechanical; it was the almost unconscious result of an impulsion which came from without and to which he never devoted much thought. He never really understood the grandeur of the priesthood, nor the extent and gravity of the obligations it imposes.

All his life of a seminarian was characterized by insignificance, mediocrity. He had neither love of study, nor fidelity to the rule, nor fervor in his religious exercises; but there were no serious or scandalous omissions in these matters. He was passable, so long as no generous effort was required; and since at the seminary, thanks to the many things which there help to sustain one, this effort is seldom necessary, he fulfilled what is essential in the seminarian's duties.

Judged from the outside, his life was that of a regular seminarian; but it was lacking in what should have been its animating principle: the spirit of faith, union with God, the desire of attaining holiness, and especially self-denial.

A meditation hardly worthy of the name; exercises of piety performed carelessly; little or no mortification; outside of what is prescribed for the community no other rule than caprice. Seldom a Christian thought; hardly ever did the prospect of the priesthood arouse him to anything like earnest effort.

There are in the seminary, independently of the many means of sanctification which are daily met with, blessed times when grace acts more strongly on the heart, and when all feel the need of renewal: feasts, annual retreats, ordinations.

The seminarian whom we are describing experienced, indeed, these divine assaults of grace. He had, on such occasions, emotions in his soul, some velleities in his will. But such passing impressions left slight traces, nothing was really changed; the sad monotony of tepidity continued. What he was when he received tonsure he remained up to the day of his priestly ordination: ever the same apathy, ever the same insensibility.

2. The good seminarian does not without a feeling of real sadness leave the place where God's voice was so often heard in his heart, calling him and confirming him in His service, in which he received his initiation into the priestly state and the priestly virtues. The priest of whom we speak left the seminary with joy and relief. The rule's constraint weighed upon his love of independence; the entering upon a freer life was like escape from a long captivity.

He does not, like the bad priest, profit by this greater liberty to do anything very wrong. He fulfils the essential duties of his ministry; his tone, his language, his manners are correct. He is a fairly respectable man; but he is far from being a real priest.

For the real priest is pious, he loves prayer

and makes of it his sweetest occupation. But the insignificant priest prays little, or not at all. His exercises of piety are what they were at the seminary—those of them that are not dropped. You never see him before the Blessed Sacrament; meditation is unknown to him; he says his breviary without inner application; he goes to the altar without fervor. He is not pious.

The real priest loves solitude and retirement. He goes out only when duty or propriety demands it. He is seldom seen at social reunions, few of his evenings are given to visits not connected with his priestly ministration. The unpriestly priest on the contrary, having no love of books and no taste for visiting people who do not make pleasant companions, constantly indulges his inclination to social intercourse, to play, to travelling. His life is worldly, dissipated, sensual and idle.

The real priest is zealous; the insignificant priest has only a languid sort of zeal. Restricting himself to what may be called his official ministry, he does nothing, conceives nothing, undertakes nothing. No charitable works or pious associations are inaugurated or encouraged by him; he is not on the lookout for occasions to revive faith and piety. Even in the

accomplishment of his divine functions, how cold he is! There is no life, nor vehemence, nor feeling in his words. He languishes and everything about him languishes. Is it his fault if people do not come to church? if they neglect even their Easter duty? What can he do about it? St. Paul's spirit burned within him in seeing Athens given up to idolatry; the insignificant priest can view with perfect equanimity a parish, perhaps good at the beginning, deteriorating under his direction. He does not realize that a priest's duty is not merely to refrain from what would cause the loss of souls, but to work zealously for their salvation.

What an awakening when the insignificant priest appears before the Supreme Pastor to give an account of the souls entrusted to him, and lost while he slept!

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Am I not, O my God, in this state of lukewarmness, of negligence, and apathy, which should make me fear that I may be one day an indifferent worker in thy vineyard?

What is my purpose in becoming a priest? Is it to work for the salvation of souls, to

devote myself to their service? Am I determined to neglect no means of doing them good?

Oh, Lord, enlighten my mind that I may have a proper ideal of the priesthood, purify my heart, dispel my illusions, give generous courage to my will. Give me the grace to be at present a model seminarian that I may not later on be so unfortunate as to become an insignificant priest.

I take the resolutions:

1. To purify my intentions regarding the priesthood;

2. To be careful to profit by the graces of sanctification which I receive in the seminary;

3. Frequently to stir up my fervor, asking myself how I am standing with God and my duties.

*I would that thou wert cold or hot, but because thou art lukewarm, . . . I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.*¹

¹ APOC., 3¹⁵⁻¹⁶

XVIII

—C THE GOOD PRIEST

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our divine Savior and thank him for the consoling spectacle which the Christian priesthood presents us; the apostles, the holy priests of the early ages, the saintly pontiffs and bishops of all times besides the countless multitude of good priests. We will render our homage to them all and ask them to obtain for us grace to imitate their example.

II. We will consider three things about the good priest.

1. *His preparation for the priesthood.* It was full of fervor. This fervor sometimes dates from a very tender age; more often from the entrance into or from the first years of seminary life. The good priest was a pious, studious and obedient seminarian. He prepared himself for his ordination with fervor.

2. *His ministry.* It has the blessing of God. Watchful and prudent, the good priest avoids all snares; he is obedient; he loves prayer and study; he labors for the sanctification of his people; he has a passionate love for souls and is willing to sacrifice himself in order to cleanse them from their sins and lead them to perfection.

3. *His death.* It is sweet and full of consolation; and this because, on the one hand, the good priest is detached from all things, and, on the other because the prospect of the future life can not but fill him with confidence.

III. We will tell our Savior of our desire to become good priests. We will beseech him to make us good seminarians.

We will resolve:

1. To be faithful and exact in the observance of the rules;

2. To profit by all the graces of the seminary;

3. To take a lively interest in all priestly works.

Beatus ille servus quem, cum venerit Dominus ejus, invenerit sic facientem.

I. ADORATION

Let us contemplate in spirit the sublime spectacle which the Christian priesthood presents to our view. It is the treasure, the ornament, the glory of the Church. Never was there anything to be compared with it. Among all the works of the Holy Spirit none other is so lofty and so magnificent.

In the foremost rank are the apostles who founded the Church: the apostles so imperfect at first but after the descent of the Holy Ghost, so great, so courageous, so heroic. Then the first priests of the new dispensation models for all who were to succeed them in the priesthood.

Next comes that admirable line of Roman pontiffs, glorious successors of Peter whose sanctity, virtues and science, shed so much lustre in every age.

Then the saintly bishops, many of whom the Church has placed upon her altars. How many others, though not publicly honored by the Church, were, nevertheless, saintly and illustrious rulers.

Around these illustrious princes of the Church is grouped a countless multitude of holy priests and levites, their co-laborers and support.

And yet, beside those whose names are recorded in history there is a multitude of others who have died poor and forgotten, known only to God and the little group of souls for whose sanctification they labored.

Let us picture to ourselves that army of good priests, who, in the past and even in our own time, consecrated their lives to the work of the apostolate in lonely country places, among the ignorant and the poor. Their names will never be found on history's pages, but they are written with letters of gold in the book of life.

*Quorum nomina sunt in libro vitae.*¹

Illustrious apostles, holy pontiffs, venerable

¹ PHILIP., 4³

priests, pious and fervent levites, who now enjoy in heaven the reward of your labors, we too, unworthy though we be, are of your race, we are your sons, heirs to your prerogatives and your graces.

*Qui stellata Poli tangitis atria
Proles vestra sumus, pontifices sacri.*¹

Obtain for us from Jesus Christ the great High Priest, your Head and ours, the grace to follow your example and to walk in your footsteps, so that filled with zeal for our own sanctification and for the sanctification of others, we may be worthy continuers of your labors on earth and sharers of your glory in heaven.

*Quae suprema tenetis
Nati possideant bona?*²

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Three things sum up the life of a good priest: a fervent preparation, a ministry blessed by God, a death that is sweet and full of consolation.

¹ *Hymn. festi Sacerdotii.*

² *Hymn. festi Sacerdotii.*

1. *A fervent preparation.* Even fervent seminarians have been seen to become sometimes lukewarm and even worse after their ordination. Never did a negligent and tepid seminarian become a fervent priest. The good priest therefore was a good seminarian.

With some the signs of vocation appeared in the earliest childhood, and became more and more manifest as the years went by. Children of election, they grew up, so to say, like Samuel, in the shadow of the sanctuary and under the protection of God, who preserved them from all corruption. Their youth was pure, and, when they entered the seminary they were admirably prepared to receive that priestly formation which was to dispose them for Holy Orders. In the seminary they were a consolation to their superiors and the edification of their fellow-students. They were obedient, laborious, fervent and charitable; and these qualities increased and developed according as their ideas on the priesthood became more and more complete and lofty and especially as they advanced nearer and nearer towards the priesthood.

With others falls and weaknesses, marred their early youth; their vocation was undecided for a long time. But on their entering the seminary all uncertainty vanished, all their

doubts disappeared. Grace had conquered; they felt constrained to devote themselves to God forever. Everybody was struck with the change and no one hesitated now to recognise as chosen for the priesthood those who, up to then had given legitimate cause for apprehension.

The good priest was invariably faithful to grace during his seminary life. The priestly ordination found him well prepared and communicated to him in abundance, the spirit of Jesus Christ. When he left the seminary, his fervor, his piety and his zeal were sufficient guarantee of what he would be in the ministry.

2. *A ministry blessed by God.* These marks were not delusive. One of the principal cares of this pious seminarian in the days which preceded his ordination, had been to draw up a rule of life, by means of which he might be able to continue in the world the practices to which he had been faithful in the seminary. This rule has become for him an inviolable law in the the ministry. His is a serious life indeed.

Two dominating thoughts inspire and direct the good priest and serve as the mainspring of all his actions: his own sanctification and the salvation of the souls confided to his care.

Penetrated with the salutary lessons he had received and of which he is ever mindful, he realizes that it is his duty to be holy, and very holy: this is, therefore, the first object of his zeal. He does not overlook the fact that dangers of more than one kind threaten him, that his very ministry places him in delicate situations, that even things which he considers most holy can become a snare for him. In consequence he exercises a strict vigilance over himself, over his senses, and over his imagination. A prudent reserve rules all his conduct, he watches particularly over his heart, lest some seduction might cause a fall. The good priest is above all chaste and pure.

He is submissive and respectful towards his bishop and superiors, always speaking of them with respect and never joining in fault findings and criticisms directed against them. He has a horror for that feeling of independence which is so common today. The promise he made on the day of his ordination, he is determined to keep inviolable.

Whatever virtues holy priests have practiced he tries to practice too. Like them, he endeavors to become more humble, more mortified, more detached from the world, more patient and resigned from day to day.

And, as all human efforts to acquire virtue

will be useless unless grace, the fruit of fervent prayer, come to our aid, the good priest is careful not to overlook this means of perfection. He prays, and prays well. The devout celebration of the holysacrifice of the Mass and the pious and attentive recitation of the breviary serve as two centres about which all the other actions of the day are grouped. A fervent meditation, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, spiritual readings make up the daily programme of his pious exercises. Thus the good priest, far from relaxing in the work of his own sanctification, perfects himself unceasingly.

The priesthood, however, imposes on him who is invested with it, an end far more excellent than his own sanctification, the sanctification of the souls of others. *For them do I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.*¹ *I endure all things for the sake of the elect, said St. Paul, that they also may obtain salvation.*²

Such, too, is the disposition of a good priest. He knows that he is not a priest for himself but for others, and, consequently, it is his duty to give all that he has, to deliver himself up,

¹ ST. JOHN., 17¹⁰

² II TIM., 2¹⁰

even to sacrifice his life for them if necessary. *Impendam et superimpendar ipse pro animabus vestris.*¹

He loves souls with a kind of heavenly passion, with all the energies of love of which he is capable. He rejoices when he sees them pure and holy: he is sad and disappointed when he sees them weighed down by the fetters of sin. All that he has, both in the order of nature and the order of grace, is employed for their sanctification.

Not satisfied with destroying the reign of sin in them, he tries to lead them to perfection. He knows how to discern those whom God calls to an eminent degree of sanctity and they are the special object of his zeal. He is particularly careful to promote the action of divine grace in their souls and to aid their progress in the practice of Christian virtues.

It is in such holy employments as these that the life of a good priest goes on: and we might say that if he does not always succeed as well as he would like, God, nevertheless, always stores up sweet consolations for him. His ministry is not always crowned with entire success, but it is never without fruit. The mere

¹ II COR., 12¹⁵

residence of a good priest is a blessing of God which sooner or later bears its fruits.

3. *His death is sweet and full of consolation.* There are two things which are calculated to disquiet a soul about to depart from this life: regret of what it leaves in this world, and fear of what awaits it in the next. The good priest, however, views the approach of death with calmness and serenity. Ever since he said the "*Domini pars*," his heart has been detached from all things earthly, living more in eternity than in time. What regret can he have when God calls him?

The future has no terrors for him. On the contrary it fills him with confidence. He has lived but to know, love and serve Jesus Christ. Need he fear to appear before his tribunal? What other sentence could he hear from the sacred lips but the consoling words: *Euge serve bone et fidelis, intra in gaudium Domini tui*.¹ Many souls that were saved by him have preceded him into heaven. Will they not be his intercessors?

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Many a time, O my God, has the portrait of the good priest been presented to my view and

¹ ST. MATT., 25²¹

it is always with joy that I have contemplated the ideal which I ought to realize. For thou seest, O Lord, the desires of my heart, thou knowest that in my dreams of the future I ever had but one object, one desire, to become a good priest, a useful priest, a priest truly animated by thy own spirit and ever ready for any sacrifice. This has been the practical conclusion of all my retreats; such, too, is the object of all my prayers, the aim of all my aspirations, the subject of my conversations with my fellow students. There is nothing more grand, nothing more beautiful, nothing more divine.

In order to become a good priest I must be a good seminarian. Help me with thy grace O my God, and enable me to keep the following resolutions:

1. To be faithful in the accomplishment of my duties as a seminarian;
2. To profit by all the graces and all the means of sanctification which are offered me in the seminary;
3. To interest myself in all that pertains to a priestly life, works of zeal the conversion of sinners, the revival of Christian piety.

*Beatus ille servus quem, cum venerit Dominus ejus, invenerit sic facientem.*¹

¹ ST. MATT., 24⁴⁶

XIX

JESUS CHRIST THE IDEAL OF THE PRIEST

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord as the great High Priest of the new Law. Not only is he a priest: he is the one priest. We will then adore him as the source and model of our priesthood.

II. We will consider Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Priest, as our model in three different states.

1. *In his life on earth.* He is the model of self-sacrifice. The whole life of our Savior was one long martyrdom. After his example all priests ought to practise self-denial and offer themselves as victims to God.

2. *In his life in heaven.* There he is a model of the virtue of religion. Nothing can be compared to the religion of Jesus. The priest's mission is to represent Christ in the accomplishment of this loving worship.

3. *In his Eucharistic life.* There our Lord gives his priests the example of true charity. In the sacred host Jesus gives himself. He gives himself in all places, at all times, to all men. He gives himself in order to purify souls. The priest should do the same.

III. We will adore Jesus once more, as the model of priestly sanctity, and beseech him to fulfil his designs in us.

We will resolve:

1. To study the characteristics of the ideal priest in our divine Lord.

2. To beg him to communicate the spirit of his priesthood to us.

3. To examine ourselves to see how abundantly we share in this spirit.

Talis decebat ut nobis esset pontifex, sanctus, innocens, impollutus, segregatus a peccatoribus et excelsior cælis factus.

I. ADORATION

We will adore Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Pontiff of the new law, constituted priest by his divine Father: *Tu es sacerdos in æternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech.*¹ *Habentes Pontificem magnum qui penetravit cælos, Jesum Filium Dei.*²

Jesus Christ is truly priest; for in him is admirably realized the definition of the priesthood given in Holy Writ. Although he is God, he has nevertheless been chosen from among men, whose nature he assumed: *Ex hominibus as-*

¹ PS., 109⁴

² HEB., 4¹⁴

sumptus.¹ He has been constituted mediator between God and men by a positive decree of his heavenly Father. He has then, to intercede for men to obtain for them grace and pardon, to offer their homages before the great white throne. *Pro hominibus constituitur in his quae sunt ad Deum*.²

This exalted mission he has fulfilled by offering the most holy of all sacrifices: *Ut offerat dona et sacrificia pro peccatis*.³ Not only is Jesus Christ truly priest but he is the one priest. As there is but one mediator, so, too, there is but one priest.

There were various priesthoods before the coming of the Messiah, but they were merely figures of the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Since the Redeemer ascended into heaven the Church has given birth to many priests. But these priests have no other priesthood than that of Jesus Christ, being made partakers thereof by their ordination.

Thou art indeed, dear Lord, the one true Priest: *Tu es sacerdos*. Thou wert a priest yesterday; thou art a priest today; thou wilt be a priest forever; and except in thee no one

¹ HEB., 5¹

² HEB., 5¹

³ HEB., 5¹

will ever be able to lay claim to that admirable title.

It is, then, from thee that the priesthood of which thou hast called me to partake has descended. Poured out in all its fullness upon thy own head, the oil of priestly consecration flows down upon each one of us and associates us with thee in thy office of mediator. From thee come those amazing powers which it is our privilege to exercise. Vain and powerless would be the words of our lips and the blessings of our hands didst thou not give them efficacy.

But if thou art the source of our priesthood, thou art also the model of the duties it imposes on us and the virtues it demands of us. These duties and virtues on which so often I did meditate, I wish now to consider in thee as in their most sublime and perfect ideal.

Prostrate then at thy feet, in profound adoration, with fervent love I wish, my Jesus, to make this meditation with my eyes fixed upon thy divine perfections.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

We may consider Jesus Christ, the High Priest, in three different states: in his life upon

earth, where he offered himself in sacrifice; in his life in heaven, where he renders continual praise before the throne of God; in his Eucharistic life where he gives himself to men for their nourishment and sanctification. He is the model of self-sacrifice in the first; in the second the model of religion; and in the third, the model of charity.

1. Jesus in his *sacrifice upon earth* is the model of the priestly self-sacrifice. The whole life of the Savior from his conception to his death, was nothing else but one long and painful sacrifice: *Tota vita Christi crux fuit et martyrium*.¹ The mystery of Calvary was indeed the most perfect manifestation of this life of sacrifice, but Jesus Christ had begun to suffer long before he fell into the hands of the Jews. In the very beginning of his public ministry the Baptist pointed him out to the world as the victim of God: *Ecce Agnus Dei*.

What is meant by immolation and sacrifice? It is the free and voluntary renunciation of the life of the old Adam, of that life of ease and pleasure and satisfaction in things created;—a renunciation which, since the fall is for man the compulsory rule of sanctity. Is not this

¹ IMIT., 2¹²

signified by the mysterious expulsion from the earthly paradise, the garden of delight?

Now the mission of Christ, the new Adam, was to show and inaugurate this new path which alone can lead us to true life: *Initiavit nobis viam novam et viventem*.¹

Thus did he begin the exercise of his divine priesthood. His immolation consisted in denying himself every satisfaction, useless or unlawful, all self-seeking, all self-complacency and attachment to creatures: *Christus non sibi placuit*; in voluntarily depriving himself of the joys of life and taking up a life of poverty, obscurity, mortification and labor; but above all, in accepting and bearing the cross with all the sufferings, all the bitterness, all the ignominy which accompanied it; and this he did not only with patience and resignation but even with love and joy.

In every one of the different phases of his sacrifice, Jesus is a model for all Christians, but he is especially so for his priests, since they are obliged much more strictly than the simple faithful to live a life of detachment and self-denial as the Church reminds them in every possible way.

¹ HEB., 10²⁰

Like Jesus, the priest ought to immolate himself and offer himself to God as a victim for sin. Though living in the world he is forbidden to attach his heart to the world, to live its life, to enjoy its pleasures. He must teach penance and self-denial much more by example than by word.

2. Jesus in his *life in heaven*, the model of priestly religion. After his immolation Jesus returned to heaven to render eternal glory to God and to pay him acts of homage and worship worthy of his infinite majesty. For this vale of tears is the land of those who struggle and suffer; heaven is the blessed abode of those who, disengaged forever from the life of the senses, live only from God and for God.

The chief disposition, we might say the only disposition of Jesus Christ in heaven, is that of perfect religion. Nothing in heaven or on earth can be compared to the religion of Jesus. Never did adoration, self-abasement, praise, thanksgiving, petition go up from a human soul with greater purity, greater perfection, greater fulness.

Our Lord offers to his Father the homages of angels and of men. He worships God in the name of all creatures and of this worship there will be no end; his suppliant voice will never be silent; and from his sacred heart God receives an

homage of infinite value, worthy indeed of the divine majesty.

Now, this sublime worship ought not to have its expression only in heaven; it should find an echo also on earth in the hearts of the priests. It is as a priest that Jesus glorifies God; it is then but reasonable that all those whom he calls to share in his priesthood should glorify God with him. The Church imposes upon her priests the duty of public prayer; an imperfect, but true image, an incomplete but real expression of the universal, uninterrupted and incomparable worship which the incarnate Word renders to God, in heaven.

3. Jesus in his *Eucharistic life* is the model of priestly *charity*. If Jesus lives for God in heaven, he lives for men in the Eucharist. It is his love for men that makes him work that awful miracle of changing bread and wine into his body and blood. And surely this sacrament is the most magnificent gift which infinite power inspired by an infinite love could give us in our exile.

Every day, or rather, every moment of the day and night, he renews this miracle upon our altars in order to apply to us the fruit of his adorable sacrifice, and give us the merits of his divine passion. Nay more than that, he even

conceals himself under the appearances of bread and wine in order to become our food and drink, and unite himself to us as intimately as the food we take to sustain our life.

In short, to give his friends the sweet consolation of remaining in his presence for a long time, he has been willing to dwell under the sacred species, thus becoming our companion in our exile, and our consoler amid the trials of life.

He gives himself to us without reserve even to the extent of becoming our food and transforming us into him.

He gives himself in every place. Wherever there is a priest and an altar he becomes present, and, the more perfectly to give himself, he multiplies his presence in a miraculous manner.

He gives himself at all times. He is always in the tabernacle, day and night, at all hours; always willing to receive us.

He gives himself to all: the rich and poor, the old and the young, all are welcome. He excludes none. He even gives himself to the unworthy in whose hearts he is to be profaned.

In speaking of this mystery to the newly ordained priests the Church tells them: *Imitmini quod tractatis*. It is in fact particularly

in the Eucharist that Jesus presents himself to his priests as the divine model of that charity of which their whole life should be the expression.

The priest, too, should give himself; and, if he has a right understanding of his priesthood, he will do so, in all places, at all times, and to all men, as Jesus does. He will manage to be present wherever there is a chance to do some good.

Day and night, during his meals, his work, and in hours of rest, he will always be ready to help whosoever desires his ministrations.

In short, no one, no matter who he be, is excluded from his charity. He shows himself equally kind, equally devoted, equally charitable towards all.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Thou, O Jesus, art the priest par excellence and the perfect model of sacerdotal sanctity. Many times during my seminary life has this truth been brought home to me, and nearly every day thy image presents itself to me as the divine type, the perfect ideal which I ought to strive to reproduce in myself, if I wish to be a true priest.

But thou art not only the model of priestly sanctity; thou art also the source from which I ought to draw this sanctity.

Thou hast called me to the priesthood: and I accept the invitation only because I have the assurance that such is thy holy will. Finish thy work, O my God, pour forth thy priestly spirit upon me; give me thy holiness, thy religion, thy charity, so that I may be truly, not by the character alone but also by my life, another Christ.

I resolve:

1. To study the characteristics of the ideal priest in our divine Lord.

2. To beg this divine model of the priest to give me a share in the spirit of his priesthood.

3. To examine myself every day to see what progress I make in the acquisition of this spirit.

*Talis decebat ut nobis esset pontifex, sanctus, innocens, impollutus, segregatus a peccatoribus, et excelsior coelis factus.*¹

¹ HEB.. 7²⁶

XX

RENEWAL OF THE CLERICAL PROMISES

SUMMARY

- I. We shall adore Our Lord in his providential care for priests, his friends. He makes great demands on them, but grants them abundant graces. We shall adore him, again, frequently repeating during his life the offering he had made to the Father at the moment of the Incarnation, thus giving us a model of the renewal of our holy promises.
- II. We shall see that the pious formula of clerical consecration, while recalling to the priest the fervent yielding of himself to God on the day of tonsure, is of a nature to remind him of important duties of his state of life. It inculcates detachment, the obligation of seeking in God alone comfort and joy, of regarding God's interests as the priest's own interests.
- III. We shall repeat with joy the solemn words by which we first devoted ourselves to God to serve him in the sanctuary. We shall humble ourselves at the thought of the many acts of unfaithfulness committed since our tonsure.

We will resolve:

1. To repeat every morning the words: *Dominus pars.*

2. To meditate on them from time to time.
3. To examine ourselves every evening on our faithfulness to our engagements.

*Ergo nunc tua gens se tibi consecrat.
Ergo nostra manes portio, tu Deus,
Qui de virgine natus,
Per nos saepe renasceris.*

I. ADORATION

Let us adore Our Lord Jesus Christ manifesting his very special love and care for his priests. They are the chosen portion of his flock, the object of his tenderness and his solicitude. The other members of his church are his servants, priests are his friends. *I will not now call you servants*, he says to them all in the person of the Apostles, *but I have called you friends*.¹

In taking them into his service, he makes great demands on them. He exacts a renunciation of what other men most ardently desire, that they live in perfect purity, that they distinguish themselves by eminent holiness, that they be men of God wholly given up to the action of grace. But with what prodigal

¹ ST. JOHN, 15¹⁶

abundance does he not grant them light and helps of all kind? Does not my whole priestly life bear witness to this truth?

Each day pious practices bring me back to the thought of the great duties which my vocation lays upon me. The yearly retreat places them before my eyes in a still more explicit and impressive way; for a whole week apart from the world and occupied with the things of eternity, I can go into my soul, and, to use the Apostle's language, resuscitate in it the priestly life. It is likewise a grace of inner renewal which I receive when I repeat on my knees before my bishop the formula by which I bound myself in the holy order of the clergy. Touching ceremony, in which I never take part without the sweetest emotions, and especially without feeling myself more desirous of belonging to God and of consecrating myself unreservedly to his service.

Many times, O Jesus, in the course of thy life thou didst renew the offering by which thou hadst consecrated thyself to the Father by the first free act of thy human will. Fill me with thy spirit that the renovation of my clerical promises may be the beginning of a period of more fervent service in my life as a priest.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The renewal of my clerical promises is profitable in the first place because they bring before me the earnest whole-hearted consecration of myself to God in the days of my preparation to the priesthood; but it is profitable, too, because it is an engagement which I take to live in conformity with my past resolutions and my present duty as a cleric. Deign, O God, to grant me in this meditation the grace of understanding the words of my promise and all the obligations which they impose upon me, and to give to my will the strength and the courage to accomplish them.

“Thou art, O Lord, the portion of my inheritance and of my cup: *Dominus pars hereditatis meae et calicis mei.*”

All men belong, it is true, to God who created them; all owe him homage, love, obedience.

But just as there are on the earth objects, places, days more especially consecrated to the service of God, this divine Master has willed that there should be in human society a select company which would be his; it is the Clergy. Erstwhile God separated from the human race a privileged people to be his people, and from this people a tribe which belonged

to him by a special title and of which He willed to be the only heritage: *I am thy portion and inheritance in the midst of the children of Israel.*¹ These beautiful words are eminently verified in us, priests and levites of the New Law, who are the portion of God at the same time that God is our portion.

Dominus pars. God is my portion. This means that I must live detached from all things. It is not enough for me to renounce what God's law condemns; my renunciation must be more extensive. It must be a universal and generous setting aside of the goods which the world seeks, pleasures, riches, honors. If I held to anything created, it would not be completely true to say that God is my portion, since I should have another portion on earth. Consequently, that I may say: *Dominus pars*, it is necessary that my heart, closed against earthly affections, be opened only heavenward.

Dominus pars. God is my inheritance. That means that I must find in God alone my rest, my joy, my happiness. I shall love, then, to think of him, to converse with him, to live in his presence. The exercises of piety which unite me to him, meditation, the Holy Office, the Mass, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, will be regarded by me as of capital importance.

¹ NUMB. 18²⁰

The peace and the joy which they furnish will replace for me the earthly joys which I have renounced.

Dominus pars. God is my inheritance. Consequently there must be between God and me a solidarity and community of interests. All that promotes God's glory and extends his kingdom, all that sanctifies the souls he loves, will be dear to me. Not satisfied with desiring that God be better known, loved and served, I shall do all I can to make men know, love and serve him.

Such are the engagements contracted when I received tonsure. By renewing them I proclaim that, far from repenting having taken God as my portion, I congratulate myself on my choice. It is indeed a chain that binds me; but it is a glorious chain; nothing is as precious in my eyes: *The lines are fallen unto me in goodly places, for my inheritance is goodly to me.*¹

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

I am about to repeat, O my God, the words which the church placed on my lips the day I entered the sanctuary. I love this beautiful

¹ Ps., 15⁶

and impressive formula. I pronounced it joyously on the day of my tonsure, and it seems to me that while my voice uttered it my heart ratified it and yielded itself to thee, O my God, with no reserve. Many a time since then I have protested that I wished to belong to you and to live as a true cleric. Have I done so? Have I born witness by my life, as I have by my words, that thou art really my all? Must I not, on the contrary, acknowledge that I have often failed in this respect. I wish to make reparation for my unfaithfulness. Repeating the *Dominus pars* I again take the engagement to live as a real cleric, that is to say, no longer to live for the world or for myself, but for thee alone in Christ Jesus.

O Mary, immaculate queen, patroness and model of clerics, it is under thy auspices that I consecrated myself to God to serve him in his sanctuary, and it is again under thy auspices that I wish to renew my consecration. Deign to bless it and to obtain for me from thy divine Son the grace to be constantly faithful.

My resolutions will be:

1. To repeat each morning, when putting on my cassock, the words of the clerical consecration.

2. To take them occasionally as a subject of meditation, in order better to realize the obligations which they lay upon me.

3. To examine myself every evening on my faithfulness to my clerical promises.

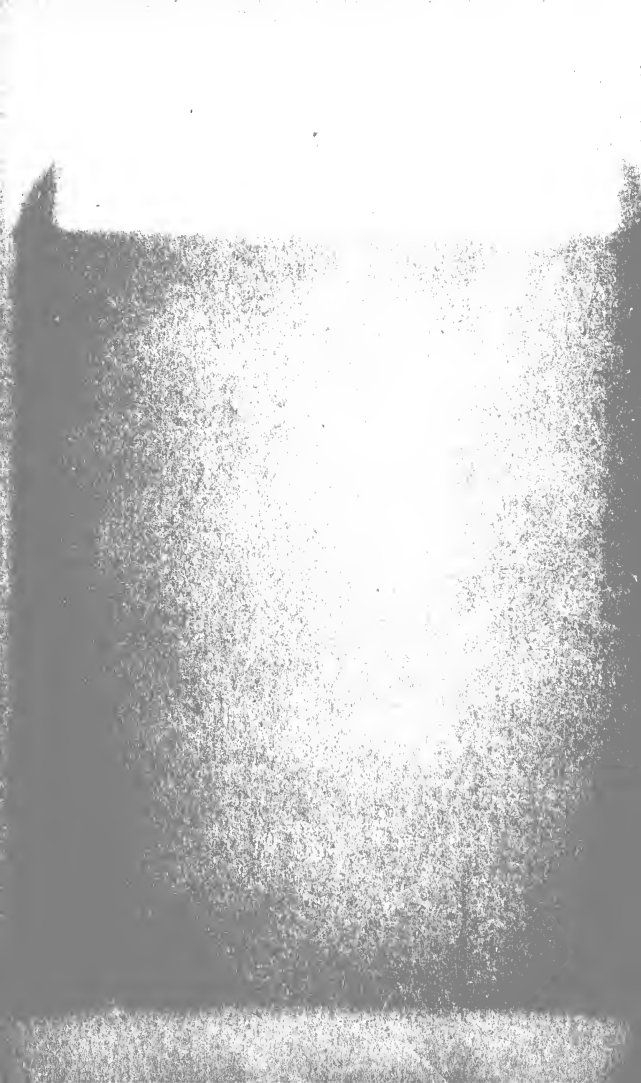
*Ergo nunc tua gens se tibi consecrat.
Ergo nostra manes portio, tu Deus,
Qui de virgine natus,
Per nos saepe renascaris.*¹



¹ *Hymn for the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin.*







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